

Most people understand that when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, we were separated from God and lost our relationship with Him. But why did Jesus have to die? Why do we need Him to die to reconcile us back to God? Why couldn't God just forgive us? Why couldn't God just look at the sin of Adam and Eve and decide it wasn't a big deal and just move past it? Why did Jesus have to leave heaven, come to earth, live a perfect life, be tortured, crucified, and die on a Roman cross, then resurrect three days later?

**Why did Jesus die?** Thoughtful people have pondered that question for 2000 years. When we read the gospels, the record looks something like this:

*He was a good man, a very good man who went about doing good. Even his enemies testified to His integrity. He couldn't be bribed, pressured, threatened or intimidated. He healed the sick, raised the dead, caused the blind to see, made the lame to walk, and preached the Good News to the poor. The common people heard Him and love Him. So how did Jesus end up dying on a Roman cross? What crime had He committed that would allow this seeming miscarriage of justice? It's not a theoretical question.*

When Mel Gibson's, *Passion of the Christ*, became a megahit in 2004, the question hit the headlines. For a brief moment, Jesus and His Cross became fashionable again. Reporters discussed the movie and talked about what the death of Christ meant. In response to the movie, John Piper wrote a short book, *50 Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die* (**picture**). In it he writes near the beginning: *The most important question of the 21st century is: Why did Jesus Christ come and die?*

I don't think many people would choose: *Why Did Jesus Die?* as the most important question of the 21st century. We might ask "Why is there so much suffering in the world?" or "Will there ever be world peace?" or even "How can I know God?" as the central questions of our age. But if you dig deeper, you can see what John Piper is getting at. All the other "great questions" of our time lead us back to ultimate questions about God and His purposes in the world. We will never understand God until we understand Jesus' Cross. No chapter helps us more in our quest than Isaiah 53.

Today we're approaching what's been called the Mount Everest of the Old Testament. Charles Spurgeon (**picture**) called this chapter "*the Bible in miniature, the gospel in its essence.*" It's as if the Prophet Isaiah somehow had a front-row seat at Golgotha and personally witnessed the terrible suffering of Jesus. It's the very heart of the gospel and the "*heart of the heart*" comes in Isaiah 53:4-6 (p. 614). No other passage more clearly expresses the "why" behind the death of Christ.

As we look at these verses, we quickly notice how many times Isaiah uses "*our*" and "*we*" or "*us*." "*Our griefs*" "*Our sorrows*" "*We esteemed Him*" "*Our transgressions*" "*Our iniquities*" "*His chastisement brought us peace*" "*With His wounds we are healed*" "*We...have gone astray*" "*We have turned*" "*The iniquities of us all*"

Nothing in this passage makes sense until we feel the full weight of this truth: What Jesus did, He did for us. Jesus died for us. What He suffered was for us. The pain, the brutality and the indignity of the cross, it was all for us.

From our perspective, we may say that Jesus was betrayed, tried, beaten, mocked, humiliated, crowned with thorns, convicted in a kangaroo court, falsely accused, beaten until His skin was shredded, forced to carry His own cross, and then publicly crucified...the most brutal form of execution in His day. If we focus on those events, we may come to the conclusion that Jesus shouldn't have died, that it was all a big mistake...that somehow the powers of darkness finally triumphed over the light.

The Bible never denies the moral culpability of those who murdered Jesus. In Acts 2:23 Peter says, "*This Jesus...you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*" So it's perfectly proper for us to say that Jesus was murdered by His enemies. His blood is on their hands. But that's not the end of the story. Far from it. The Bible writers unite to declare that Jesus laid down his own life, that no one took it from Him. J. C. Ryle (**picture**) offers this perceptive comment: "*He did not die because He could not help it; He did not suffer because He could not escape. All the soldiers of Pilate's army could not have taken Him, if He had not been willing to be taken. They could not have hurt a hair of His head, if He had not given them permission.*" That all brings us to the real message of Isaiah 53:4-6. As you read these verses, let your heart be warmed by the thought that Jesus died on purpose, not by accident, so that sinners like you and I could be saved. You are in the "we" and so am I. You and I are in the "us" for whom Christ died. Our Lord's suffering was not His fault, it was ours. The more personally we read this passage, the more Christ's death will mean to us. That's because...

**1. Jesus took our pain.** "*Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted*" (v. 4).

When Isaiah speaks of what Christ has done for us, he does not start with our sin and our guilt. That comes later. He begins instead with our infirmities. The text says that Christ has “borne” our griefs. It’s a Hebrew word that means to lift up and carry away a heavy load. It’s used in Leviticus 16 for the scapegoat who carried away the sins of the nation. The idea here is that Jesus came to lift the heavy burden of sadness brought about by our sin and the pain of living in a sinful world. Perhaps you know the famous gospel song that starts this way:

*What a friend we have in Jesus,  
All our sins and griefs to bear.*

We have many griefs because we live in a fallen world. We have many sorrows because we ourselves are fallen people. And we need someone who can bear our grief when the burden is too heavy for us.

Pastor Colin Smith (**picture**) explains it this way: “*He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrow. That must include the division in your family, the loss of your job, the death of your husband, and the pain of your past.*” In Christ we don’t have some far-off God, but in Him we find a God who drew near to us, who came to us, who entered our world and became one of us, that He might carry our sorrows for us.

*Your pain will not have the last word.  
Your sorrows will not last forever.*

*Jesus has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.*

Os Guinness (**picture**) tells the following story in *No God But God*: “In one of their periodic efforts to eradicate religious belief in the Soviet Union, the Communist Party sent KGB agents to the nation’s churches on a Sunday morning. One agent was struck by the deep devotion of an elderly woman who was kissing the feet of a life-size carving of Christ on the cross. “Babushka [Grandmother],” he said. “Are you also prepared to kiss the feet of the beloved general secretary of our great Communist Party?” “Why, of course,” came the immediate reply. “But only if you crucify him first.” Where else can you find a Savior like this?

**2. Jesus took our punishment.** “*But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed*” (v. 5). “*He was pierced*” – as with a spear. “*He was crushed*” – pulverized, broken, ground to pieces. “*Upon Him was the chastisement*” – beaten with a whip. “*By His wounds*” – His body cut, bruised, his skin flayed.

It’s not always understood that our Lord died in terrible pain. If you run the clock back from 3 o’clock in the afternoon—the moment of His death—to about 1 o’clock in the morning and review what had happened to Jesus as He moves through those hours—what you discover is that our Lord has just been through 14 hours of torture.

Arrested in the middle of the night. Slapped. Shoved around. Mocked. Slapped again. Crowned with thorns that went into His scalp. Scourged with a large strap studded with bits of bone and stone and metal. His beard ripped out. Beaten again and again. Forced to carry His own cross. Nails driven through His hands and feet. Crucified.

At this point a strange question comes to mind. *Was Jesus a failure?* You could make a good case that the answer is *Yes*. Just look at His life. He was born into an unimportant family in an unimportant village. He was ignored, taken for granted and laughed at. When He speaks, the powers that be want nothing to do with Him. He faces ridicule, opposition and misunderstanding all His life. In the end He’s crucified like a common criminal. His sufferings in those last few hours are unspeakable. When He dies He appears to be yet another forgotten footnote in history. Working with the facts on one level, you could make the case that our Lord was a failure.

But His death is not the end of the story. Jesus didn’t fail in what He came to do. He perfectly fulfilled the Father’s will. His death is not the end of the story, but really the beginning.

Look what we have in return: We have *peace* with God. The word means “wholeness, health, the absence of war, and safety.” In a messed-up world filled with broken people and broken promises, through Jesus Christ we have peace that passes all human understanding.

We’re *healed*. We’re healed from our guilt, healed from our hatred, healed from our doubt, and healed from our shame. Through Christ broken people are put back together again. So was Jesus a failure? No!

He took our sin, bore our pain, and through His death on the cross, He healed us from the inside out so that we now live in peace.

**3. Jesus took our place.** “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (v. 6). Someone has said that Isaiah 53:6 is the “*John 3:16 of the Old Testament*” because this verse makes the way of salvation so clear that we cannot miss it. So was Jesus a failure? No!

Note that “*all*” is the first and the last word of verse 6. We have *all* sinned. We have *all* gone astray. We have *all* missed the mark. We have *all* turned to our own way. We’re *all* in the same boat, and the boat is going down. If God doesn’t do something, we’re *all* going to die.

At this point we encounter the great, glorious news of the gospel. God has done something! He could have looked at the mess we made and said, “They deserve it. They messed up. Now let them face the consequences.” If God had said that, He would be 100% justified. God was under no obligation to rescue us when we wandered astray.

We said, “Leave me alone!” But God said, “I can’t do that.” “*And the Lord has laid on Him.*” That’s Jesus! That’s the great Servant of the Lord who came from heaven on a divine rescue mission. God laid our sins on Jesus. That’s the doctrine of substitution. It’s the heart of gospel. He took my place when He died. God laid my sins and your sins on Him.

Let’s suppose that all your sins have been written in one massive book. That book is heavy because it records every rotten thing you’ve ever said, every unkind word you’ve ever spoken, every mean thought, every lustful fantasy, every evil imagination, and all your bad attitudes from the day of your birth till the day of your death. Picture yourself trying to hold that massive book in your hands.

But now picture Jesus standing next to you. He’s holy, perfect, pure and good. He has no book in His hands because He never sinned. You want to be rid of the book but you can’t seem to find a place to put it down. What will you do?

Finally, picture Christ on the Cross, with the weight of billions of books upon His bleeding back. He bears that crushing weight as long as He can, then He dies. Look closely and you’ll see that each book is the personal record of someone who lived on the earth. If you look closely, you can see your book too. He took your sins—the record of all your evil and all your failings and all your shortcomings—He took it all upon Himself when He died on the Cross. Truly, the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Would you like to go to heaven? You can. Isaiah 53 contains the good news we all need. He was bruised—for us. He was wounded—for us. He was beaten, betrayed, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified—all for us. Our sins drove Jesus to the cross. But He did not go unwillingly. If our sins drove Him there, it was His love for us that kept Him there.

If you want to go to heaven, pay attention to Isaiah 53:6. Remember that it begins and ends with the word “*all.*” One man gave his testimony this way: “*I stooped down low and went in at the first ‘all.’ Then I stood up straight and walked out at the last ‘all.’*” The first *all* tells us that we’re all sinners; the last “*all*” tells us Christ has paid the price for our sins. Go in at the first “*all*” and come out at the last “*all*,” and you’ll discover the way of salvation.

When President Dwight Eisenhower (**picture**) was hospitalized for the final time before he died, Billy Graham (**picture**) paid him a visit. At one point President Eisenhower asked, “Can an old sinner like me ever go to heaven?” Billy Graham assured him that even “old sinners” can go to heaven by trusting in Jesus. There’s good news for “old sinners,” “young sinners,” “big sinners,” “small sinners,” and everyone in between. Jesus has paid the price in full so that you can go to heaven. It doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done or how bad your record might be. If you know that you are a sinner, you can be saved.

How can I be so sure about that? Because Jesus was pierced for your transgressions and crushed for your iniquities.

**Conclusion:** In 1875 Philip Bliss (**picture**) wrote a hymn based on Isaiah 53 called *Hallelujah! What a Savior!* Speaking of this song, Ira Sankey (a composer and musician who served with D. L. Moody) said:

A few weeks before his death Mr. Bliss visited the State prison at Jackson, Michigan, where, after a very touching talk on “The Man of Sorrows,” he sang this hymn with great power. Many of the prisoners dated their conversion from that day. Here are the words to that hymn:

*Man of Sorrows! what a name  
For the Son of God, who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!  
In my place condemned He stood  
Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood;  
Sealed my pardon with His blood.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!  
Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
“Full atonement!” can it be?  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!  
Lifted up was He to die;  
“It is finished!” was His cry;  
Now in Heav’n exalted high.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

*Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
When He comes, our glorious King,  
All His ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew His song we'll sing:  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

My friend, how do we receive God's gift of salvation? Simply by asking for it. Do you know in your heart that you want Christ in your life? You can have Him today. It's the wonder of the gospel. Please don't say, "I'll do my best and come to Christ later." Friend, that's the language of hell. You can't be saved as long as you hold to your notions of goodness.

If you want to be saved, remember these four words: *Run to the cross!* Run to the cross and lay hold of Jesus Christ who loved you and died for you. God is fully satisfied with the work of His Son.

Remember that "*the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*" Do you believe that? If you have any stirring in your heart, any sense of your need, any desire to be saved by His grace, that desire has been placed in your heart by God. Now the rest is up to you. Run to the cross where Jesus waits to meet you. Come to Him and trust Him as your personal Savior today!