

## Pre-sermon Reading

ROMANS 3:21-26 “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (ESV)

### **Series: The Reign of Grace: A Study Through Romans**

#### **Righteousness Revealed in the Suffering Servant / Daniel Hickinbotham July 31, 2022**

## INTRODUCTION

- We are jumping back into our series in Romans.
- For context: we spent almost 10 weeks looking at how Paul smashes into DUST the idea that there is some form of human behavior, religious or irreligious, that can possibly merit the approval of God.
  - He directs our attention first to the pagan and demonstrates that he is not merely IGNORANT of God, but he is ACTIVELY AND PREDJUDICIALLY suppressing the truth about God in his unrighteousness.
  - Next, he turns upon the moralist and reveals that their own morality, their own beloved righteous standard by which they judge everyone else, is the evidence which will substantiate the moralist's own condemnation.
  - Lastly, he goes after to the religious, the one who assumes their right standing before God due to their holy book, their religious pedigree, their external trappings of religiosity... Paul reveals all those things will serve to heap judgment upon them on the day of the Lord.
    - By the middle of Romans Chapter 3 it is crystal clear...
      - In ourselves... We have no hope of righteousness before a perfectly holy God.
  - Just when you think there is no other option than total despair... two simple words bring relief...
    - BUT NOW... But now righteousness of God is manifested through faith in Jesus Christ.
      - God presented HIM... Jesus... as a propitiation, the atoning sacrifice that satisfies God's holy judgment and makes us holy...
- We are going to spend the next few weeks discussing that sacrifice... that atoning work... because it is relevant both as a currently controversial topic and because of its ramifications in the Christian life.
- The concept of Penal substitutionary atonement appears to be fully out of favor in rarified air of the academy, but that rejection is beginning to trickle down from the intellectual peaks into the mainstream.

- This has happened through the rise to prominence of the New Perspective, which Jeff touched on a little over a month ago.
  - Also, the appeal of public theologians like Brian Zahnd and Greg Boyd has grown. They see the concept of Christ being executed in our place as a pagan concept smuggled into our theology by bloodthirsty medievalists or ignorant near-pagan tribesmen.
    - Some self-described “red letter” Christians even dismiss it as an invention of Paul, claiming it is foreign to Christ’s own words and ministry described in the Gospels.
      - Culturally, as the church in the West has come under greater public rejection, this is one of those issues that can be used to dismiss the church as unenlightened at best or barbaric at worst.
    - But we are convinced by the scriptures that although it is not the only aspect of atonement provided for in the work of Christ, it is the primary and chief component.... This penal substitution.
- So we are going to spend some time studying this so we can understand what Paul is saying in Romans chapter 3:21-28 and throughout the rest the book of Romans.
  - And we are going to begin this week by taking an excurses out of Romans and into the book of Isaiah.
- We are going to look at the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and there we will see not only the clear establishment of vicarious suffering which brings redemption, we will find that this unwillingness to accept the message of legal substitutionary atonement was prophesied 1000’s of years before our day...

- The Role of the Suffering Servant is **Confounding**  
Isaiah 53:1-3“53 Who has believed what we have heard\*? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn’t have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn’t value him.” (CSB)
- Now, the chapter break at 53 divides this section of Isaiah’s prophecy a little unnaturally.
  - It is actually the end of Chapter 52 that introduces this part of the discussion regarding the role and nature of the Servant of Yahweh.
    - It is a poem with 5 stanzas of 3 lines each, mirrored around the 3<sup>rd</sup>...
      - 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> deal with the Servant’s exaltation
      - 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> deal with his rejection
      - The 3<sup>rd</sup> deals with the significance of what he has done...
  - Now, the Servant of Yahweh is a prominent figure throughout the latter prophecies of Isaiah.
    - There is some controversy over WHO this servant is.
      - But we will get into the identity of the Servant later... (Spoiler Alert: It’s Jesus)
- But whoever it is, in Isaiah 52 it begins by saying he will be lifted up and highly exalted... he will have a position of honor and success... so much so that Kings will be silent before him...
  - But... it immediately dives into the discussion of his appalling disfigurement and unrecognizability as even human as the method of his exaltation...
    - Its as if the prophet Isaiah KNEW it would be nearly impossible for the human mind to connect the lowly earthly state and experience of the Suffering Servant with a concept of exaltation and honor.
      - Who can believe this...
  - He grew up like a lonely plant in a desert.
    - He didn’t come from a rich and powerful society, or of noble lineage, but rather a barren culture, of which he was a seemingly insignificant product.

- He did not appear as one would expect the emissary of Almighty God to appear.
- In the Ancient near east Kings were the emissaries of their gods, and they would dress and present themselves accordingly...
- We gravitate towards handsome and strong, not plain and unassuming.
  - We want someone who is unforgettable, with personality and dynamism, not someone who is easily rejected and despised, and certainly not one that is so lowly and unremarkable that people turn away from him.
- You know what I am talking about... the way we avert our eyes when approaching a homeless person... that kind of lowly and unremarkable..  
And in what way could he possibly be successful?
  - Victory over the nations and the silencing of kings in the ANE was accomplished by MIGHTY MEN and BURGEONING EMPIRES through overwhelming brutality in war and unwavering cruelty in subjugation, until the conquered people were so terrified by the consequences that they dared not rebel or speak out.
    - Yet this exalted emissary of Yahweh is a man associated with weakness and brokenness...
      - He is ignored... worse than ignored... he is despised... rejected...
- Now... It is difficult for us to imagine how brutal rulers of the ANE were... especially in the face of rebellion...
  - How many of you know the story of King Zedekiah?
    - He was an evil king to begin with, but he was stupid too and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar...
      - ...who marched his army to Jerusalem and laid siege to it...
      - ...when the walls finally fell, the warriors all fled, and King Zedekiah was captured.
        - Nebuchadnezzar then proceeded to kill every Judean commander... all the mighty men... and all of Zedekiah's sons right before his eyes.
          - Then... he plucked Zedekiah's eyes out... so the last thing Zedekiah ever saw was not only the slaughter of his children... but the end of his dynasty... the metaphorical end of their nation...
          - And then he dragged him away to live out his days in prison, tormented by the final images of his sight... while the best of the young men of Judah were carried off to be made Babylonians....
    - This is the same man who threw three people who wouldn't bow to an image of him INTO A FIERY FURNACE...
      - Kings of the ANE DO NOT ACCEPT REJECTION or REBELLION... the CRUSH it.

- But as we will read in the following verses, this is the very reason that Suffering Servant came. To BE rejected... to BE despised...
  - So it should be no surprise that the role of this suffering servant is unbelievable...
    - Isaiah understood what kings were like... he understood what an emissary of a king represented...
      - Of course this message of a “successful” servant would be met with disbelief... it still is today...
        - In fact, it is still intensely controversial today...

- The work of the Suffering Servant is **Substitutionary**

Isaiah 53:4-9 “Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was taken away because of oppression and judgment, and who considered his fate? For he was cut off from the land of the living; he was struck because of my people’s rebellion. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully.” (CSB)

  - What is happening here? There are two contexts we need to be aware of.
    - First is the ANE context that we have already discussed.
    - If you read the chronicles of other ANE kings, they are filled with claims to precisely the opposite of what is contained in verses 4-9

- Through their servants THEY were doing the crushing... THEY were doing the piercing... they were doing the oppressing and judging... THEY were bringing peace through the wounding of others.
  - Conquered kings remained silent before them out of terror or BECAUSE THEIR TONGUES HAD BEEN CUT OUT.
- Yet this emissary... this royal representative is taking on all those things... absorbing those things...
- Rather than punishing wayward subjects for their rejection of his Lordship, the Lord is PUNISHING the servant as though HE were the one in rebellion.
  - But it is clear that he was in no way guilty of anything...
- The Second context we need to be aware of is the Jewish context of the Mosaic Covenant.
  - When verse 4 says that he bore our sickness and pains and that we considered him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted, what images popped into the head of the Jewish hearer? What did the Jew think of when he heard about the consequences laid upon the Suffering servant for iniquities and rebellion in verse 5? What about the reference to oppression and affliction in verse 7? And what about the reference to being led like a lamb to slaughter?
    - The lamb one is easy... Surely for the Jew that evokes images of the sacrificial system detailed in the books of the law.
    - In which the sins of the community and the individual are symbolically laid upon an innocent, spotless, unblemished animal... and then that animal is killed to ATONE in the PLACE of the sinful offering bringer or the sinful community...
  - Additionally.... Part of the covenant under which sacrifices were made, was a long list of blessings for obedience and an even LONGER list of curses for disobedience.
  - Turn if you will to Deuteronomy 28...
    - Starting in verse 15... these are the affliction that God would visit upon the disobedient and rebellious...
      - Moses speaking to the covenant people of God:
        - READ
        - ...and on... and on... and on... from verse 15 to verse 68...
- This is what would have come into the mind of the Jew hearing this. This is the affliction of God on disobedience and rebellion.
  - Yet.... This innocent one... the one whom verse 9 claims was pure both externally and internally... this innocent one is punished by God... for the iniquity of us all...
    - He is clearly the substitute... he clearly is bearing the just consequences of others sins...
      - Not in a generalized... "Oh! People's sin killed him because their murderous hearts got him"

- VERSE 6 MAKES IT CLEAR... THIS PUNISHMENT IS FROM GOD... onto the servant of Yahweh... as the direct result of other people's sin.
  - The picture being painted in the Jewish mind is that the Suffering Servant is being positioned beneath the holy wrath of God against rebellious sin, to bear the weight of all the curses listed in Deuteronomy 28, including violent death, as a substitutionary sacrifice for the actual rebels.
- And Here is where the controversy within Christianity pops off.
  - There are many who abhor the concept that God would punish an innocent person in the place of the guilty, especially a Father doing it to his son.
    - Steven Chalke calls it Cosmic Child Abuse.
    - Brian Zahnd calls it a pagan concept and an outrageous libel against a God of justice and love.
  - There are many who abhor the idea that God has hatred towards sin, because sin isn't a failure to submit to a holy God as a holy God, rather it just is a failure to be fully human...
    - Men like NT Wright consider sin not to be an affront to a holy God, a violation of his sovereign authority, something deserving of his wrath. In his mind that is a neopagan concept and he can be merciless in ridicule of those who affirm the traditional Reformed view of sin.
  - When confronted by the concepts we find in this passage they invent myriad ways to get around it, to reinterpret it, to lessen the burning hatred of God against sin.
    - In earlier years my family was part of an Episcopal church... (Diet Catholic... generally very progressive)
      - Tell Story
  - Listen, those who reject substitutionary atonement have a point...
    - I mean Proverbs 17:15 says "Acquitting the guilty and condemning the just — both are detestable to the LORD."
      - There is a moral quandary set up by that... one that is pretty easily taken down...
        - First. The proverbs are wisdom sayings for the creature from the Creator, governing their creaturely behavior. Certainly, they are expressions of his nature, but He is not constrained by human conceptions of justice, we are to be constrained by His. He Himself IS the standard of justice and hence all that he does is just.
        - Second. The lasting experience of the suffering servant, the innocent substitute, is not condemnation.... God does not ultimately condemn the just in Isaiah 53... In fact...

- The Legacy of the Suffering Servant is Divine Vindication (Isaiah 53:10-12)  
Isaiah 53:10-12 “Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him severely. When you make him a guilt offering, he will see his seed, he will prolong his days, and by his hand, the Lord’s pleasure will be accomplished. 11 After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, and he will carry their iniquities. Therefore, **I will give him the many as a portion**, and he will receive **the mighty as spoil**, because he willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.
- From Genesis to Revelation it is plain that the just consequence of sin is death.
  - We all, as sons and daughters of Adam, and proactive sinners ourselves, are entitled to the just compensation of death. It is a wage owed to us. Just like a wage owed to us from an employer, it would be UNJUST for that wage not to be paid.
    - God has ordered the universe in such a way that because of sin we decay and die... physically, spiritually, mentally, relationally, morally, and emotionally.
- But... this one who was without violence (a euphemism for righteousness in behavior) and who had no deceitful speech (a euphemism for righteousness of heart)... though he passes through the anguish of decay and death, HE does not remain in that state of punishment.
  - Unlike evil Zedekiah who saw his lineage extinguished before him, his eyes darkened forever and his position of service removed at the hands of God’s instrument of judgment... this servant is promised what?
    - He will see His seed. His legacy will be prolonged. He will remain the servant of Yahweh, the Lord accomplishing his purposes through him.
    - After his anguish he will see what... light and be satisfied!
      - He will not receive the wages of death, but of life...
      - He will be richly rewarded... the many will be given to him as a portion.... The mighty will be given to him as a spoil, precisely because HE WAS an Obedient Substitute....
- The Greg Boyd’s, and Brian Zahnd’s, and NT Wright’s are not wrong in thinking that if God consigned a human to a brutal torture and death on behalf of others that He is a monster...
  - But he didn’t... Not only did the suffering servant willingly go... death was simply a waypoint, an obstacle to be surmounted on His way to Exaltation.
    - And what is his success? what is his accomplishment?
      - THAT THOSE WHOSE INIQUITIES HE TOOK WILL BE JUSTIFIED... seen as righteous... BEFORE GOD!
        - God does not only give divine vindication to the Suffering Servant but He gives it to those the servant suffered on behalf of!
        -



- How can this be? If our sins DEMAND the eternal displeasure of God... crystalized in the concept of death... How can we be justified in the sight of God by someone else's death?
- Imagine if you will that you owe a debt to someone. Let's say you stole from your rich neighbor...
  - You stole a million dollars, blew it all on the ponies at the track, and shortly after got caught.
    - What would biblical justice demand?
      - That you pay back the million, plus 20 percent.
      - And to whom do you owe that money? The state? Not in a biblical model...
        - You owe that money to the one you stole it from
        - If you can't pay it, you become their servant until they get every dime back.
    - But what would happen if Bill Gates came along and paid the 1.2 million on your behalf?
      - Would you be in right standing with your neighbor?
        - No.
        - I would argue that although you wouldn't be his slave you certainly would not be back in their good graces.
      - You are a thief. Just because he got his money back plus some doesn't change the fact that his neighbor robbed him and then didn't even pay him back, someone else did it.
        - What would it take to be justified... to be in right standing... in your neighbor's eyes?
      - It would take your neighbor ABSORBING the harm, discharging the debt, and offering you forgiveness and reconciliation.
        - Even if Bill Gates came along... Even if you earned the money to pay it back, you still SINNED against him... There is nothing YOU can do to justify yourself in the heart and mind of your neighbor... Your neighbor must justify YOU... must put you in right standing again.
  - The only way we could rightly be justified before God is if there is someone who can, not only absorb and discharge our debt, but who can give to us something that we cannot possess on our own... the approval of God.
    - And the only way a being could absorb an infinite and eternal debt... which the rebellious sins of humanity incurs... is if A) They are an infinite and eternal being and B) The debt is owed to them.
      - So... Suffering Servant must be sinless, capable of substituting for humans, yet eternal and infinite, and be the one to whom the debt of sin is owed.

- Does this sound like anyone we know?
  - Like say... the incarnate unique second person of the trinity?

- The Identity of the Suffering Servant is Jesus the Messiah.
  - (Surprise!)
- Now this is where the controversy between Christian theologians and Jewish theologians takes off.
  - In general, Jewish theologians who engage with this chapter see the Suffering Servant not as an individual, but as a metaphor for all of Israel, God's covenant people. They look to the experience of suffering and persecution of the Jews throughout history as the ongoing fulfillment of this prophecy and that one day, all the Gentile nations will be delivered over to Israel in one way or another
    - Please know that I am oversimplifying and I am not trying to strawman their argument.
      - However. Even IF that is the proper interpretation... that the suffering servant is in fact Israel... As Christians, we still know that Jesus of Nazareth is what? The TRUE Israel... so he is STILL the Suffering Servant even with consideration to the Jewish interpretation...
  - Furthermore... Nearly ALL the New Testament authors associated Jesus of Nazareth with this suffering servant.
    - Its arguable that 10 of the 12 verse of Isaiah 53 are directly quoted in the NT, and there are dozens of implied references centering around Jesus Christ, crediting him as the suffering servant.
      - These are not oblique or tangential references either.
        - The Gospel of John is packed full of implied and overt references to the Isaiah passage:
          - In John 6, Jesus talks about all the people that the Lord will give to Him... like the servant of Isaiah 53

- In John 10, Jesus says that he lays down his life... willingly... he willingly submitted to death like the Servant of Isaiah 53:12
- In John 12:32 "If I am lifted up (or exalted)... [speaking about his imminent crucifixion]... I will draw all men unto myself."
  - That sounds like the exalted servant of Isaiah 52:13 being given the many people promised in Isaiah 53:12 because he gave himself willingly to death
    - But, if you think I am imposing that on the text, just know that 5 verses later in John 12 the Apostle John DIRECTLY QUOTES Isaiah 53 saying it speaks about Jesus.
- Let's just look at the despised, rejected, and devalued language of 53:3
  - The Gospel of John makes this a regular theme:
    - John 1:10-11 "He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."
    - John 3:18-19 "Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.
- It is not just the Gospel of John... It is almost the entire New Testament except maybe Jude and Philemon
  - These are just SOME of the either direct or indirect references in the NT to just Isaiah 53:
    - Verse 1: Matthew 11, John 1, John 12, Romans 10, 1 Corinthians 1,
    - Verse 2: Luke 2, John 19, Philippians 2, Romans 8,
    - Verse 3: Matthew 26 and 27, Mark 14, Luke 9, John 1, Hebrews 5, Hebrews 12
      - Brothers and Sisters we could literally spend days tracking through all of NT scriptures which draw prophecy of the Suffering Servant.
  - As William Farmer puts it: "This evidence indicates that there is an Isaianic soteriology deeply embedded in the New Testament which finds its normative form and substance in Isaiah 53"
    - That is a fancy way of saying... You cannot understand what the New Testament is talking about in terms of salvation without Isaiah 53.
      - And it is CLEAR in the NT that there is no Salvation apart from Jesus Christ.
- And Jesus Himself made the claim that he was the Suffering servant of Isaiah 53
  - Jesus quotes the final verse of 53 in Luke 22:37

- After the celebration of the Passover meal, the Last Supper, during which Jesus proclaimed a New Covenant between God and man, Jesus was on his way to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he would be turned over to the authorities and ultimately slaughtered like the lamb they had just eaten, and he says to his disciples: *37 For I tell you, what is written must be fulfilled in me: [i] **And he was counted among the lawless... [Among the rebels]*** REFERENCING the last line of the Suffering Servant song... and then he says “Yes, what is written about me is coming to its fulfillment.”
- The bible speaks clearly: Jesus of Nazareth is the exalted Servant of Yahweh, the messiah, the one whom God punished in the place sinners, who successfully justified the many and has been given them as his portion, to whom your faith and allegiance is due.

- Application
  - Repent and Believe
    - God has made a way to both satisfy justice and to reconcile you to him. He is both just and good for doing it. And it is clear that he did because he loves you. Do not scorn this good news. Do not cling to your rebellion for which Christ willingly died. God has overlooked the former times of ignorance, but he calls all men everywhere now to repent and turn to Christ.
    - Listen. I don't care if you have gone to church your WHOLE life... I don't care if this is your first time through the door.
    - If you have not laid hold of - by faith - the substitutionary atoning work of Christ on your behalf, do not wait another day.

- You can stand righteous before the Lord in this very moment... Repent of your sin and Believe the Gospel.
- Suffer Faithfully
  - We see in this story that although it truly is anguish in every sense of the word... that suffering is not meaningless.
  - We see in this story that God indeed crushes his servants... but new wine pours forth from them because of it.
  - We see in this story that the kingdom of God goes ever forward... but like birth pangs... it is with pain and anguish and suffering.
    - Do not flee from God because it is hard. Do not flee from God because it hurts. Trust in God that it will be redeemed and bring redemption... just as it did with the suffering servant.
- Act Victoriously
  - Jesus died. He actually died. He actually did. It wasn't metaphorical. It wasn't mythical.
    - He sat beneath the cup of the wrath of God and he drank it down to its dregs.
      - Christ did this to deal with the power and the consequence of sin...
        - He did it on YOUR behalf... and it was awful...
  - But he didn't just die... He was raised to new life.
    - He was given the many as a portion
    - He is silencing the mouth of kings and sprinkling the nations, making them realms in his holy domain.
  - When we are baptized into Christ we are baptized not only into his suffering and death but into his glorious success and exaltation.
    - Do not embrace the pandemic of Christian defeatism...
      - Certainly this passage shows that the methods of victory are contrary to worldly methods, but it shows unequivocal VICTORY.
        - SO THINK AND ACT AND RAISE YOUR FAMILY AND BUILD YOUR BUSINESS AS THOUGH VICTORY IS ASSURED... because of the suffering servant...