



## **THE FORGIVENESS WE NEED**

I'll never forget the first time I really talked to Josh about the meaning of Easter. Or should I say ... he talked to me. He told me how Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey (whose name was Susanna, apparently), and people were cheering and waving palm branches. And then he said, "And on Friday He died, and it was very sad." So I asked him, "So why did Jesus die, Josh?" And he said ... well, I'll tell you at the end!

But Josh's answer is the theme of today's messianic prophecy – and arguably, the greatest prophecy of them all:

### **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**

Isaiah describes this 'Suffering Servant', through whom God forgives His people. Now in Hebrew there are 3 words for forgiveness: *salach* (to clear the debt); *kappor* (to cover over); and the one used in vs4, *nasa* (to carry away). I.e. the Suffering Servant doesn't just 'let us off'; He carries out a swap. 5 swaps, in fact. He gives us:

**1) Beauty For Ugliness** (52:13-15). As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the King of Kings, yes? But that's not the way He appeared. In fact, in the end He didn't even look that human – let alone like a king.

Now, we live in a society that is obsessed with looks, with image, whether it be the latest fad diet (*DASH*, *WW Freestyle*, Cabbage Soup), the 'Size Zero' look (even if it's just a Photoshop job), cosmetic surgery (a bit of nip 'n' tuck

or Botox), going to the gym (not that I'm anti-exercise, I hasten to add), even spray-on mud (to give your vehicle that nice 'off-road' look). Why this obsession? I reckon it's to distract ourselves from the real issue – the real 'us', if you like. The *internal* stuff. And when Jesus was nailed to that cross it was like He was reflecting that real 'us', so that we could begin to reflect the real 'Him.'

In a nutshell: He gives us His beauty for our ugliness.

**2) Joy For Sorrow** (53:1-3). Isaiah refers to Jesus as "The Arm of the LORD." Not just God's right-hand man, but God's right hand! Even so, He "grew up like a tender shoot, with no beauty or majesty, despised and rejected."

- **Think about His birth.** He was conceived outside of marriage; born in a stable-cave and wrapped in burial-cloth; His family had to flee to Egypt as refugees.
- **Think about His childhood.** He grew up in the town of Nazareth, a tiny nothing of a place, despised because of its proximity to the Roman city of Sepphoris.
- **Think about His mission.** He surrounded Himself with the poor, sick, heart-broken, vulnerable, outcasts – and remember, Jesus was relatively poor Himself.

I.e. Jesus had one hell of a life! And on the cross He became the ultimate EMO if you like, for you and for me. He took all the grief we cause to others or they cause to us or we cause to ourselves, and experienced every last bit of it, so we can know His joy. A joy that lasts forever.

**3) Healing For Brokenness** (53:4-6). We're all 'infected' with something, and it's a far more dangerous pandemic than corona virus: it's an inclination to sin. And when Jesus carried His cross through the streets of Jerusalem, He was 'bearing' that sickness on our behalf. He was:

- **Pierced for our transgressions.** Why pierced? To cleanse us of everything that makes us unrighteous.
- **Crushed for our iniquities.** Why crushed? So that all of us can be fixed, can be put back together again.
- **Punished for our peace.** Why punished? To restore the connection, the signal between us and God.
- **Striped for our healing.** Why striped? So that the scars of our sin could be dealt with, from the inside-out.

I.e. Jesus allowed Himself to suffer the consequences of our sin, even though He wasn't infected, so that His immunity, His goodness, could spread throughout the world.

He became 'sin' for us all (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**4) Freedom For Slavery** (53:7-9). Every year, at Passover, Jewish people remember how God set them free from oppression: He passed over the Land

of Egypt to strike the firstborn, but the Israelites were spared because each household killed a lamb and daubed the blood over their doorposts and lintels. Isaiah compares Jesus to those lambs, and he brings out 3 similarities:

- **He was helpless.** Lambs don't put up much of a fight. In a similar way Jesus allowed himself to be arrested – He didn't even say anything in His defence!
- **He was guiltless.** He went through 3 trials before the religious leadership of Israel and 3 trials before the political leadership – all on trumped-up charges.
- **He was selfless.** He died a criminal's death alongside 2 terrorists – but not for anything He'd done wrong. He died for all the things *we've* done wrong.

I.e. Jesus took our chains so that we could be set free. He gives us His freedom for our slavery.

**5) Victory For Defeat** (53:10-12). It would be easy to picture Jesus on that cross and see a victim. What does Isaiah see? A conqueror – One who offers His life, only to reclaim it! As Isaiah says, "He will see His offspring (be reunited with His followers), prolong His days (for eternity), prosper the will of the LORD (bring God's plans to completion), see the light of life (rise from the dead), and justify many (declare His people 'not guilty!')."

And then ... there's vs12. Now a better translation of this verse might be: "Therefore, I will give Him the many as His portion and numerous will be His spoil." Why 'better'? Because there have been many great leaders down through history – political, military, religious. Problem is: they're all dead. But Jesus is alive! Risen from the dead! Ascended into glory! And coming again!

And when He does, *we* will be there too!

### **The Craziest Swap Of All**

So why did Jesus die? What was Josh's answer? "To take away our bad stuff" (a pretty impressive answer for a 5-year old). But it was also to give us His 'good stuff' in return – the most unfair swap *ever!* It would be like a kid trading a pair of designer trainers for a pair of cheap rip-offs!

It's a *crazy* thing. But that's the love of Jesus.

Now as a response today, I'd like you to cast your mind back to where you were before Jesus. What difference has He made to you?

And if it's still 'BC' not 'AD' for you, why not ask Jesus to conduct that swap in *you?*