

“The Wonder of the Cross”

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“The wonder of the cross is not the blood, but whose blood it was and to what purpose it was shed” Donald English¹

Read Isaiah 53:1-12



In seeking to understand the story of God and the redemption of His people it is important to answer the question, “What then is the pinnacle of all history, and the ultimate display of who God is?” The central moment of all history, the greatest display of God’s eternal glory, indeed the very reason that God made the world and worked out all of history to bring things just to that point – to the fullness of time, to the minutely and flawlessly prepared stage for the mightiest of all acts – that central moment was the eternal Son of God’s taking on human flesh, accomplishing a perfect obedience, and offering himself up as a substitutionary sacrifice to achieve eternal redemption for those whom the Father had given Him. And this pivotal moment of all history was also the unparalleled display of God’s nature. God, who had been revealing himself in various ways in past ages, revealed himself fully and perfectly when he sent His Son into the world (Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:18). The greatest display of God’s nature consists in Christ completing redemption. The pinnacle of Christ’s redemptive work, in fact the moment for which he came into the world (John 12:27), occurred nearly two thousand years ago on Good Friday. The cross is both the greatest event in all of history and the mightiest display of God’s nature.”² Yet we must not forget to link Good Friday with Resurrection Sunday. This Friday is “good” because Sunday happened. To speak of the cross without remembering the resurrection is to address a corpse as if it were the person. Paul is clear concerning the significance of our Lord’s resurrection. It was the act whereby Jesus Christ is “declared the Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:4). Yet today our focus is on the wonder of the cross itself. There are five ideas I desire for us to entertain in this short read.

The first wonder is the pain of the cross. The wonder of the cross is in the Son’s willingness to bear the sins of His people (2 Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:4-6). Inside of Isaiah 53 there are nineteen words depicting this pain: despised (v. 3), forsaken (v. 3), bearing grief (v. 4), carrying sorrow (v. 4), being smitten of God and afflicted (v. 4), being pierced through for transgression (v. 5), being crushed for iniquities (v. 5), being chastened for well-being (v. 5), being scourged for healing (v. 6), bearing iniquity (v. 6), being oppressed (v. 7), being afflicted (v. 7), silent endurance (v. 7), being unjustly oppressed and falsely judged (v. 8), being crushed (v. 10), being put to grief (v. 10), being offered up as a guilt offering (v. 10), experiencing anguish of soul (v. 11), bearing iniquity (v. 11), being poured out to death (v. 12), being numbered with the transgressors (v. 12), bearing the sin of many (v. 12), and interceding for the transgressor (v. 12).

Our sin was placed on Him. The cruel reality of this truth can be noted in the Son’s desire to avoid the cross if possible and when on the cross His guttural groan, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Our sin was imputed to His account, and the Father, the righteous judge, treated Him as such. It was through the pain of the cross that our redemption from sin’s debt and our reconciliation from sin’s alienation was accomplished and applied. There is wonder in the cross knowing that God loves me and sent His only begotten Son to be my deliverer.

The second wonder is the purpose of the cross.

⁴ “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him” (Isa. 53:4-6).

It was not for His sin He suffered but for the sin of His people. Throughout Isaiah 53, emphasis is placed on **what God the Father did to, in, and through His Son for His people.** The Father smote His only begotten

Son in order that His people might be saved from the penalty of sin, the power of the sin, and the presence of sin. He did this so that we might live in a state of eternal fellowship with Him. He did this in order that we might experience Him.

Although we are exceedingly arrogant and have embraced an ideology of entitlement, you and I deserve nothing short of hell. Even the jobs we enjoy or the roof over our heads, or the food on our table are all gifts from God. Regardless as to who we are or where we live, we deserve worse than we have. Even if in hell, we would only receive what is just and right. Yet despite all this, God sent His Son to be our Savior from sin and self.

The third wonder is the power of the cross. It is because Jesus lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death that life comes from death. "John Piper summarizes the wonder of the cross in the following manner: 'The death of Christ is the wisdom of God by which the love of God saves sinners from the wrath of God, and all the while upholds and demonstrates the righteousness of God'"³ The wonder of the cross is the pleasure of God in the offering of His Son and self for the redemption of His people. The wonder of the cross is bringing life from death. The wonder of the cross is securing victory in defeat. Who of us can comprehend the magnitude and mystery of what God chose to do for those who are His?

The fourth wonder is the pleasure in the cross. The language of Isaiah in chapter 53 is breath-taking. All earthly images that one can conjure up to describe that which exceeds the mind to imagine pales in contrast to and in comparison with the wonder of the cross. The prophet tells us the "The LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief" (Isa. 53:10). Let this not escape us . . . **it pleased God to crush His only Son**. This is not the joy of the sadist or the action of a cruel tyrant. It is the pleasure produced by the perfect obedience of the Son's willingness to carry out the story to redeem His people. Somehow, in ways that are unsearchable, the servant "will justify the many" (53:11).

“. . . fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

The fifth wonder is the promise of the cross (vv. 10, 11 [Vindication]).

¹⁰ "But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. ¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:10, 11).

Our text tells us that, "He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand." God shall finish and fulfill all He foresees and foretells. Both words in verse 10 for "pleased" and "pleasure" are the same. Isaiah uses the same word with the same idea in Isaiah 55:11.

¹¹ "So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I DESIRE, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

God said it and it is so. All that He determines to do shall come to pass. Those whom He seeks to save shall be saved. God the Father will vindicate the Son's work by His resurrection from the dead.

Although the enormity of this is beyond limited minds to fully process it does not mean finite minds are stripped of the responsibility and privilege of pursuing this understanding. We must and we can meditate on these truths. Let us not relent as we push onward in our pursuit of Him. Let us continue to bind ourselves together in our common pursuit of this uncommon God.

¹ <http://www.christianity.co.nz/cross-13.htm>

² "The Centrality of the Cross," Nathan Pitchford - http://www.reformationtheology.com/2006/04/a_meditation_for_good_friday.php

³ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, chapter 2