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Good Friday Devotion – Isaiah 53:10-12

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*“He poured out his life to death, and he let himself be counted with rebellious sinners.”* That’s how Isaiah describes what happened to Jesus on Good Friday. He who was God made flesh, who earned every bit of God’s grace and blessing, who alone lived up to the standard of holiness that none of us could ever hope to – he was spit on, he was beaten, and he was subjected to what might be the greatest bodily torture this world has ever known or devised. Crucifixion was so cruel that it was reserved only for the worst of criminals, it wasn’t even legal for a Roman citizen to undergo, and it was so disturbing and taboo that it was most often addressed only in euphemisms and even hinting at it in common company was avoided at all costs.

So how did it ever come to this? Jesus only ever loved and cared for the people around him. He never committed any crimes, never fell into any sins, certainly never did anything worthy of punishment, much less this! But yet as he was nailed to that cross and hung up to die, he suffered the worst that not only mankind had to offer, but even God himself, because he was there dying under God’s wrath for our sins.

What a terribly shocking, senseless scene, isn’t it? And yet, the *why* of the matter is right here for all the world to see: *“It was the Lord’s will to crush him and to allow him to suffer... You made his life a guilt offering.”* You know, in the days of the temple, a guilt offering was *the* offering someone would make when they committed an offense against the LORD and needed to make it right again. They would sacrifice an unblemished ram to make restitution for what they had done and atone for their sin before God. Well that ram – or lamb, or bull, or bird, or whatever other animal had to lose its life because of the things we did – was really just a shadow of the true Lamb of God whose blood would forever cleanse us of all our wrongdoing, that’s what Isaiah says here. A perfect, holy, just God needs to punish sin, but instead of crushing us under the weight of our own debts, he piled all the spiritual debts of all people of all times upon that one innocent lamb, made his life a guilt offering for us, and crushed Jesus to make us right with him again. Jesus took the guilt so that you could have the grace – yes, it was the Lord’s will that his one and only Son would suffer in your place so that you would never have to.

But the story didn’t end there. See, lots of people throughout history have died for others. Lots of people have given their lives so that others might

live. But the ones who made the sacrifice always stayed dead, and the ones who went on living never stayed alive forever. That’s what makes Jesus’ sacrifice for us different. Isaiah says, *“After his soul experiences anguish, he will see the light of life. He will provide satisfaction.”* What made Jesus’ sacrifice different is that he didn’t stay dead. He *died* for us in the full confidence that soon again he would *rise* for us, too. See, that’s how we know that Jesus’ sacrifice actually succeeded like it was supposed to. If he had stayed dead, what difference would that have made? How would he have been different from anyone who came before him? No, Jesus went down into the darkness of death for us, but then rose up again to see the light of life once more. That’s how God proved that sin had no hold on him and death had no claim on him, but rather that that great death trap that eventually snaps shut every sinner within its jaws, was broken now. Ripped open. Smashed to pieces. Powerless.

So what does that mean? It means God was satisfied with Jesus as our Savior, and God is satisfied with us as his believing children, his eternal offspring. It means we are forever justified before God – incontestably declared “not guilty” in his heavenly courtroom for the sake of Jesus Christ. It means he has taken our guilt upon his shoulders and carried it away, never to hurt us or accuse us or threaten us again. It means that Jesus won “an allotment among the great,” a place in his heavenly kingdom that he’s going to share with us one day. And it means that Jesus will take home the plunder, the spoils of victory – us, his people, to live with him there forever, and he’s never going to let us go.

And so that’s why as Jesus was hung up there on the cross that day, he could pray not for vengeance, but for forgiveness for everyone who put him there. They don’t know what they’re doing, he said – and how could those Roman soldiers or how could we or any other sinners this world has ever seen really know what we are doing to Jesus or fully comprehend the consequences that our sins can bring? No, maybe we don’t know what we are doing, but Jesus prayed for all of us because he knew exactly what he was doing. Remember the rest of what Isaiah said: *“He let himself be counted with rebellious sinners. He himself carried the sin of many, and he intercedes for the rebels.”* Dear friends, there is no sin that God’s grace and forgiveness cannot overcome, that day Jesus proved it, and still to this day your Savior’s atoning blood speaks for you before the Father. So for all your sins of habit and of choice, both known and unknown, hear the Word of your Lord: in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Amen.