

Daniel Waldschmidt – Good Friday – March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016

One of Charles Dickens famous novels is *A Tale of Two Cities*. That's the one that begins, "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." Two of the main characters are named Sydney Carton and Charles Darney. Charles Darney had a wife and children but it was the French revolution and Charles Darney got in trouble in the French revolution and he was sentenced to be executed. While Charles Darney was in prison waiting to be executed, Sydney Carton sneaks into his jail cell at night. Now Charles Darney and Sydney Carton look a lot alike. And so Sydney Carton says to Charles, "Quick, give me your clothes. I'm going to die instead of you." And Charles Darney says, "No! I'll never let you do that." So Sydney Carton hits him over the head and knocks him out and Sydney pretends to be Charles Darney. There was a woman in the same prison who knew Charles Darnay and came up to Sydney and started talking to him as if he were Charles Darney. But of course she figures it out after a few minutes and her eyes get real wide and she says, "Are you dying for him?" And Sydney Carton says "Shhh. Yes. And for his wife and kids." That's what Jesus did for us. He put on our clothes, so to speak, by becoming a human being, and he died instead of us.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah wrote 700 years before Jesus was even born. But when you read Isaiah 53 it is like Isaiah was right there in front of the cross. **"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. ... he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors."** (Isaiah 53:5, 12) You and I were condemned to die because of our sins, but just like Sydney Carton took the place of Charles Darney. Jesus took our place so that we could go free. I'm sure that Charles Darney was eternally grateful to Sydney Carton. As we read Isaiah 53 tonight let's be eternally grateful to Jesus for taking our place under God's wrath.

AT the beginning of the passage God says, **"See my servant will act wisely."** (52:13) There are lots of names for Jesus in the Bible. Son of God, Son of Man, Lord, Messiah. Isaiah's favorite name for Jesus is one we don't hear as often. Isaiah's favorite name for Jesus is **"the Servant of the Lord."** Jesus served God perfectly his entire life. It says in verse 9, **"He had done no violence and no deceit was found in his mouth."** (Isaiah 53:9) Our sin is passed to him and his perfect innocence is passed to us.

We call it Good Friday because it is the day when our sins were taken away. But even though we know its Good, Good Friday can be a little hard to take sometimes. It's hard to see Jesus up there on the cross, bleeding and dying a violent death. It says, **"His form was disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness."** (Isaiah 52:14) It can be kind of hard to take. If you have ever seen a movie about the crucifixion of Jesus it can be kind of hard to watch. Isaiah knows that it is hard to watch and so right at the beginning of the passage Isaiah reminds us that this is all going to end in glory. He says, **"He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted."** (52:13) Jesus was raised from the dead on Easter Sunday (**He will be raised**). He ascended into heaven 40 days later (**He will be lifted up**). And right now he reigns in glory in heaven (**He will be highly exalted**). ON good Friday he suffered a degradation that was less than human, but now he reigns in glory because he is more than human.

Verse 4 says, **"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering."** (53:4) I'd like to share with you a selection from a short story called "The Ragman" by Walter Wangerin Jr. It pictures nicely this verse that Jesus took up our pain and bore our suffering.

**I saw a strange sight. Even before the dawn on Friday morning, I noticed a young man, handsome and strong, walking in the alleys of the city. He was pulling an old cart, filled with clothes; and he was calling in a clear, resonant voice, "Rags! New rags for old, I'll take your tired, old rags. Rags!" Soon the Ragman saw a woman sitting on her back porch. She was sobbing into her handkerchief, shedding thousands of tears. Her shoulders shook. Her heart was breaking. The Ragman stopped his cart. Quietly he walked to the woman and asked, "Will you give me your rag; I'll give you another." He slipped the handkerchief from her eyes, and laid across her palm a linen cloth so clean and new that it shined? Then as he began to pull his cart again, the Ragman did a strange thing. He put her tearstained handkerchief to his own face; and began to weep, to sob as grievously as she had done. Yet she was left behind without a tear. "Rags! Rags! New rags for old!"**

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<sup>1</sup> This analogy is taken from Pastor Tim Keller.

The story goes on to say that he came across someone who was bleeding from the forehead and wiping it with a rag and so of course he takes the bloody rag and the person's wound disappears but the ragman starts bleeding. That's what Jesus did for us, he took on himself a life of suffering and in exchange gave to us the life of blessedness which we will experience fully in heaven.

We are now very thankful to Jesus for doing this but Isaiah points out that we didn't always feel this way about Jesus. He says, **"He despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted."** (Isaiah 53:3-4) I said before that Good Friday can be kind of hard to take because of the horror of what was happening to Jesus. But it is even more hard to take when we realize that when we look at Jesus on Good Friday, we are looking at what should have happened to us. In a sense we are looking in the mirror because those are our sins that are being placed on him. But that's the point! They are on him they are not on us. That is the essence of Christianity. He took our sins off of us and put them on himself. Notice how many times the pronouns he and our are repeated in these verses. **"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering ... But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."** (Isaiah 53:4-5) He took our place. That's the essence of Christianity.

One thing in this passage is kind of strange. It says in verse 8, **"He was cut off from the land of the living."** (53:8) But then it says in verse 10, **"He will see his offspring"** (53:10) Now first of all Jesus wasn't married. He didn't have any physical children. And plus it says he was cut off from the land of the living. He died without having any kids. Why does it say, **"He will see his offspring"**? Jesus once said something in the gospel of John. He said, **"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds."** (John 12:24) Jesus' death has given life to all of us and we are his offspring in that sense.

And it says that **"he will see his offspring and that God will prolong his days. It says that after he has suffered, he will see the light of life."** (Isaiah 53:10-11) Is Jesus dead or alive right now? Jesus is alive right now. And he's alive not just in the sense that his soul went to heaven when he died and his soul lives on in heaven. No he's alive in the sense that God raised his body from the dead in a glorious resurrection.

**That short story that I read from before, The Ragman. It's ends like this: By now I had to run to keep up with the Ragman. Though he was weeping uncontrollably and bleeding freely at the forehead The little old Ragman came upon a landfill, a garbage dump. He climbed the hill. With tormented labor he cleared a little space on the hill. Then he sighed. He lay down. He pillowed his head on a handkerchief. He covered his bones with a jacket; and he died. But then on Sunday morning, I was awakened by a violent light, a pure, hard, demanding light shining against my face. I looked up, and I saw the last and the first wonder of all. There was the Ragman, folding his clothes, a scar on his face, but alive! And besides that, healthy! There was no sign of sorrow, nor of age, and all the rags that he had gathered shined with cleanliness! I walked into the Ragman's presence. He put new rags on me. And now I glow in the sight of the Ragman, this Ragman, the Christ. Amen.**