

120 A Man of Sorrows

Easter poses a problem for the retail trade! On the one hand here is an opportunity for some extra business, building on the old cliché, "It's Easter so get spending and have a jolly good time!". On the other hand the great Easter truths of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection don't do much to help the whirring cash tills. So the trick is to retain the title of Easter but to remove its heart and replace it with bunnies and eggs and fun.

There aren't too many bunnies, eggs and fun in Isaiah Chapters 52 and 53. Here are extraordinary prophecies, given by the Lord through His servant Isaiah over 600 years before they were fulfilled. They foretell that God's Servant, the Messiah, His Anointed One, far from being the Conquering Hero who the Jews were expecting, was going to have a very grim time of it. No wonder the Jews still struggle with these words, as did that Ethiopian eunuch on his way down to Gaza (Acts 8.26ff).

For this Figure was going to be so viciously assaulted as to cause astonishment amongst onlookers (52.14). He would have no attractive features (53.2), and would be despised and rejected of men, truly indeed "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (53.3): stricken, smitten of God, afflicted, wounded, bruised, oppressed; a lamb taken to the slaughter, remaining silent in the face of this dreadfulness; cut off from the land of the living, involved in His death and burial with both the wicked and the rich (vv 4-9).

It has long been fashionable, amongst the "thinking classes" and the opinion formers, to write off the Bible and dismiss the Christian Faith, centred on Jesus Christ as the Son of God, as somehow having been exposed, shown up, seen to be false. The Bible is deemed to get in the way of "progress" in the modern world, and is therefore best ignored.

The perpetrators of such arrogance and folly are not only causing a fearful mess of things wherever we care to look. They also wholly ignore the evidence before our eyes, such as, for example, these prophecies of Isaiah being so meticulously fulfilled in the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ centuries later. If such prophecies are not evidence of divine omniscience, omnipotence, authorship and revelation, then nothing is! Truly, "there are none so blind as those who don't want to see".

You can look across all the other "world faiths" and their writings for anything remotely similar to the more-than-700 promised and then-fulfilled prophecies

within the Holy Bible. A fruitless search? - Yes, for you will find absolutely nothing at all of this nature in any other writings. But also No, not a fruitless search, for it reveals that the Bible stands wholly alone in this world, with not a rival in sight. Such facts demonstrate beyond any possible shadow of doubt that the Bible is indeed what it claims to be - the extraordinary, precious, unique Word of God, truly "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path" (Psalm 119.105). There is no other.

So, back to Isaiah 53. All that suffering, by the Lord Jesus Christ, was undergone for God His Father, and for us. Christ has paid the sin-debt for us, the debt none of us can pay ourselves, and has taken on to Himself the punishment due to us: "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (v 6) it pleased the Lord to bruise Him ... He has put Him to grief ... His soul an offering for sin He shall bear their iniquities ... He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (vv 10-12).

"God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son " (John 3.16a). "But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5.8). ".... the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me " (Galatians 2.20b).

Amazing grace indeed, and offered freely to any who will accept that Jesus Christ is Lord. Now we can look beyond the grimness of Golgotha and the bleakness of the sealed tomb, to the Resurrection Morning. "Sir, where have you laid Him?", Mary asked. The risen Jesus spoke just one precious word in reply - her name.

The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!

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