

Jesus' Unique Suffering

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 September 2026

Preacher: Rev. Alasdair Macleod

[0:00] Let me invite you to take your Bibles and to have them open at the chapter we read earlier on in Isaiah 53.

I don't know if you've ever been in the situation where you've been asked to collect somebody, either from the ferry terminal or the airport or perhaps a train station or a bus station, and you don't actually know what the person looks like.

In our generation, we have the ability to perhaps go on social media and try and see if we can find a picture of the person that they're speaking of. But if you draw a blank when you've done your social media search and you're left with a mere description, sometimes it's less than helpful.

Somebody described, well, they've got dark hair and their medium height and their middle age. It doesn't really help you as you try and figure out who somebody might be. But it does make you focus either on the exit point of the bus or the airport or whatever it might be.

As people come in, you are focused. You are looking to try and see if there's something in the description that you have that might help you recognize the person that you're actually looking for.

[1:47] And hopefully you walk up to the right person. Well, bear that in mind as you think that some 700 odd years before the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, walked on the face of this earth, the people of God were given certain details by which they might be able to identify the Savior of the world when He would come.

Some of these details would involve His birth and the circumstances of His birth, that He would be born from a virgin.

And people would say, well, absolutely impossible. How can that take place? And I would say, correct, unless it is God who is choosing to intervene in the world in which He's created.

But as well as the details of His birth that would help them to figure out the identity of the Messiah, the details of His death would be even more significant for them to figure out the identity of the individual who had come from God to be the Savior of the world.

Because the Messiah was going to suffer. The Savior of the world was going to suffer, not just for a short period of time, but His was going to be an intense and a prolonged suffering that He was going to endure on the basis of a punishment that He Himself was not guilty of.

[3:15] And when they would put together the circumstances of His birth and the circumstances of His death, then these details would point towards the identity of the one sent by God to deal with the estrangement between a fallen human race and the holy Creator God.

And so, the circumstances of His birth and the circumstances of His death and even the circumstances that would happen after His death with His resurrection, none of these fall into the normal categories in that sense.

And so, these pointers, these promises, these descriptors would all be pointed forward. And so, the people who would be alert in that sense and would be able to understand what the Bible was saying to them, they would be able then to identify the one who had promised or the one who was promised and the one who came in time to deal ultimately with our sins once and for all.

And so, it's in thinking of one component part of the identification process that I want to zero in on this morning. I want us to think about the description of what happens with our Savior as he would die and specifically the suffering that he would endure, the sorrow that he would live with, and to try and focus in a little bit on that unique suffering that the Savior of the world would experience on your behalf and on my behalf.

And so, that's what we're going to be thinking of today, the unique suffering of our Savior. And I want us to kick off by reminding ourselves that although the Word of God here describes Jesus as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, we need to be clear that that doesn't mean that Jesus

was some sort of miserable, morose character.

[5:17] How do we know that? Well, if you think of miserable, morose characters, I hope you can't think of very many. But if you think of people who fit that description, you realize that people aren't drawn to them, are they?

Adults aren't drawn to those who are miserable and morose. Kids most definitely are not drawn to those who are miserable and morose. But young and old were drawn to Jesus because there was something about Jesus he said and compellingly attractive.

Not simply what he said and why he said it and how he said it and to whom he said it. Not simply how he engaged with people. There was something about his character that was so attractive to individuals.

Now, it's possible, and I emphasize it's possible, that as people engaged with Jesus, they didn't recognize the sorrow and suffering that he was living with in that sense.

I say that because you and I can engage with people, and we can engage with them, and we can go away thinking that, you know, they're in a very, perhaps, in a good place, and you go away from them, and you feel brighter having spent time in their company.

[6:38] And yet, so very often, some of those folks who make us feel brighter are those who themselves are carrying burdens and struggles that we're unaware of.

It's why we also need to be so very careful as to how we engage with each other. Now, it was very possible that as people engaged with Jesus, that's what they felt. I mean, the Bible is clear. He said he was a man of sorrows.

It didn't mean he was miserable, but he meant he carried burdens, and he carried suffering that perhaps was not visible, and certainly that carried suffering that they were not necessarily aware that it was suffering that they were causing, that he was carrying, that we were going to cause, that he was carrying, but that there was suffering, there was that sense of sorrow.

Now, of course, building this picture, or just clarifying this picture, that while Jesus is a man of sorrows, that does not mean Jesus did not know the full range of human emotions. When he took to himself a human frame, a body, mind, and soul, human experiences of limitations, of needing sleep, and needing food, and needing water, and living life as we would, meant that there were occasions that Jesus knew joy.

He tells us in Scripture himself, in John 15, Jesus speaks about, these things I've spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. He said he's got a joy that, if we tap into, will lead us to overflow with joy.

[8:09] We have another reference in Luke chapter 10, in verse 21, it says, in that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus was a man of sorrows.

There was a weight bearing upon him, but there was also these occasions that Jesus knew joy, and that if we know him, his joy will become our joy.

And yet, so we're balancing this together, that Jesus did know suffering and sorrow in this life, and it wasn't simply that he knew suffering and sorrow in this life, when it came to the events surrounding his death.

Life was not straightforward for Jesus in any way. Jesus was poorer than any of us can probably imagine. That the only wardrobe that he had, the only clothing that he had, was what he wore.

He speaks about not having a place to lay his head. He knew a level of poverty that you and I can't really relate to. He also experienced what it was to live with the harshness of life in that generation.

[9:23] Do you remember there was an incident when his enemy said to him, you're not yet 50 and you're talking about knowing Abraham, when Jesus was only actually around about 30 at that time? Such was the hardness of his life.

He looked, his physical appearance was that he looked almost 20 years older than he actually was. That doesn't scream out a life lived of ease and comfort, does it?

No, that speaks of a life lived of difficulty, of stress. Thinking about how he was almost harassed by the enemy at every turn that he took.

That Satan would be there trying to exploit in different ways. Sometimes with overt opposition.

Sometimes very subtly. Sometimes even using some of the words of Jesus' closest followers.

So he's harassed at every turn. He's one who had the demands of so many people. You can't blame them for the demands that they placed in Jesus.

[10 : 25] If you think about it, there must have been almost an unheard of season of good health in that part of Galilee when Jesus ministered.

That those who would have been making their living trying to come up with various concoctions of the time to deal with some of the ailments, well, they wouldn't have been particularly busy at that point because everyone of whatever illness was being taken to Jesus.

The constant demands that were being placed upon him. The exhaustion that he felt.

Misunderstanding. Being stalked by the enemies. Ultimately, he knew what it was to be rejected.

Not simply by the establishment and not simply by the public opinion, but somebody who once put even been rejected by his own disciples in that sense.

He knew sorrows. His life was not just a small section of suffering. There was suffering throughout his life.

[11 : 26] And yet, as verse 3 makes it so very clear, he was, this servant figure was to be despised. He was to be rejected.

He was going to be isolated. He was going to be misunderstood. There was going to be no sympathy shown towards him in that sense. His was going to be a suffering and a sorrow caused as a consequence of the mission that he had chosen to take to himself.

And so when you think of that mission, we then put it in the context of the identity of the person who is accepting that mission and fulfilling that mission. And rather unlike, in fact, the complete opposite to some of the stories that we like to hear.

You know, you sometimes hear of these rags to riches stories, don't you? Those who had a really tough start in life, overcoming obstacle after obstacle, and they were thriving, and they made sure that their family generations coming after them didn't have to struggle the way they did.

It was a rags to riches story. And when we think of this Savior, his is a riches to rags story, isn't it? It's a reversal. Because as we think of the one who is this man of sorrows and the suffering that he was going to experience that would culminate at Calvary, we think of the stepping down and the descent from the glories of heaven into this world.

[12 : 58] And what a step down it was to be born into this world. And what a step down it was, yet further, to be raised and to be affiliated with that part of Israel that nobody wanted to be affiliated with.

Nazareth. Can anything good come from Nazareth? And then he steps down even further with this life. He's living there almost.

This forgotten existence in one way, you could describe it. And then he bursts onto the scene through being baptized. He had no sins to be forgiven of, but he comes to identify his people and he comes down yet further to identify with those who are sinners.

And then he steps down again and he's going to be tempted. He's going to be assaulted by the enemy. There's going to be that constant sense of opposition. There's going to be that persecution. There's going to be actually the betrayal. And all these are steps down. And there's going to be all that will unfold with the trial that he's going to have to face. His death.

[14 : 02] His burial. His death. His death. His burial. His death. His burial. All of which is a step down.

And in one sense, all of which is a step further away from his rightful environment. And all that was precious to him in that rightful environment.

He is a man of sorrows. He is acquainted with grief. But it's not his sorrows because the next verse tells us, isn't it? He carried our sorrows. He's a man of sorrows because of our sorrows.

He's a man who suffered because of the sufferings that was due to us. And so as we think about the sufferings of Jesus, I want to just press into this a little bit more because in one way, we could analyze the sufferings of Jesus and say that there are sufferings that Jesus experienced that we might be able to relate to to an extent.

But there are sufferings that Jesus experienced that we absolutely cannot relate to. So if we think of some of the suffering that Jesus experienced that we can relate to, I mean, we live in this broken world that Jesus lived in.

[15 : 16] Jesus knows the brokenness of this world. He knows how difficult life can be. It makes it so very precious that when we come to Him and we know that we will find one who can sympathize with us in our weakness because He's been here.

But He's one who knew what it was to be betrayed in that sense, to be betrayed by those who were close to Him.

He, of course, knew what it was to be betrayed by Judas and to be abandoned by His friends. He had opened up to His friends and He had let them know just how traumatic and difficult this, what was about to unfold, was going to be.

He shared what was going on on the inside with Him. And having done so, you'd think, therefore, that there'd be that much more focused concentration on helping Him.

But no. But no. He'd opened up and they weren't there to be with Him. He knew real isolation in that sense.

[16:31] And you and I, sadly, can go through experiences where those that we trust and those at times that we love will not react in the way that we expect them to react.

And even when, you know, it costs us and it's hard to open up and we eventually do and it doesn't seem to get the response that we expect it to be, that, you know, we can relate to a degree, not to the same extent, but to a degree we can relate to.

And we can relate to being treated like that by those who like us, those who say they love us. We can also relate to an extent to dealing with those people who don't like us and who don't love us.

You know, that's the reality that, you know, nobody is liked and loved by everybody in that world.

There's people who don't like us. And they may have reason, they may not have reason.

But Jesus knew what it was not to be liked. He knew what it was to have enemies who were prepared to do anything. And I mean anything, who were prepared to do anything to get rid of him.

[17:46] And whether that is their various plots that were thwarted, whether that is to gather together a corrupt court to condemn him without due process being carried out, he knows what that is, that's like.

He knows the consequences of being treated as an enemy. And so, and so, if we know sometimes the difficulty of relations with those who like us, we know the difficulty of relations with those who don't like us.

And there are, for some of the Lord's people today, in different parts of the world, there are some of the physical repercussions that Jesus went through that some of the Lord's people today go through.

We're really blessed in the congregation that I serve in Ibrness that one of the guys in the congregation is a representative of Release International.

And, you know, he's constantly bringing before us reminders of what the persecuted people are having to go through and some of the horrors.

[18:58] And the way people say, well, you want to be associated with Jesus? Well, we'll treat you as Jesus was treated. And the physical abuse and the torture and whatever else that goes there. I mean, that's what happened to Jesus, wasn't it?

I mean, the abuse, the dehumanizing that took place so that they're asking the question, verse 14 of chapter 52, who is that?

Who? In fact, what is that? Such was the dehumanizing suffering that Jesus would go through.

Such is the suffering that some of his people have to go through.

So there is a sense in which when we think of the suffering that Jesus went through, there is a sense, a small sense that we can relate to components of it. But there's a sense in which we cannot.

Because there's components of the suffering that Jesus endured that we cannot identify with in our experience. Because the suffering that Jesus endured at its deepest level was not at the hands of his friends and it was not at the hands of his enemies.

[20:14] It was at the hands of his heavenly father, the one who would hand him over, the one who would deliver him up. The heavenly father before whom Jesus stood guilty, having absorbed my sin and your sin to himself.

He stands before the heavenly father, the holy God, the judge, guilty with our sins upon him. And he would face the consequences of that.

He would face the forsakenness because of that. All of the facets that would be involved in the punishment of hell for all eternity were given to him, handed down as he faced the judgment that was due to us before his heavenly father.

And so, the sufferings that we cannot relate to, if we press into this a little bit more, we would see that they would be in a number of different levels, wouldn't they?

Number one, they would be the suffering that he relates to is a representative suffering. That he's not suffering for what he is due himself.

[21 : 37] He is suffering as a representative, the righteous one, the perfect one, for the unrighteous, the imperfect. Now, we sometimes see in society how people are targeted as representing a particular bad thing that's happened.

For some of you, you probably can't remember, but if you go back to 2008 and there was a banking crash and there was many countries throughout the world lost lots of money and the narrative that came out was that the bankers are still getting their bonuses while the people are losing their money, while the countries are becoming poorer and the focus of the nation's ire landed on a representative, a guy called Fred Goodwin from the RBS.

He had his knighthood stripped from him. He was the public enemy number one. He was the face of the very illustration of the bankers and the chaos that they caused.

He's the representative in that sense and he faced the ire. He wasn't the only one by any means, but the vast majority of them are unheard of. He was the guy who was chosen as the representative and he was guilty in that sense as others of them were in gambling with the nation's money.

Well, we let them do it and when you let people do things, we can't really complain when they do what they've been led to do. Anyway, that's a different story. But here you've got a representative who is not associated with the guilt that he now carries the people that he represents because he is the one who is the representative in his suffering of all of his people and take it a step further, all of the sin of all of his people.

[23 : 34] That is now absorbed in Jesus and who he is upon that cross. And so, if we think of it this way, he is, the whole tonnage of the lust of his people or the lies of his people or the hypocrisy of his people or the lack of love of his people and whatever other sins we may identify from Scripture, there are so many.

The things that we've done that we shouldn't and the things that we should have done but we didn't, every single one of them is given to this representative.

And he is the one who's going to suffer as the representative of all those who are guilty. And in his suffering, as the passage goes on to speak there, in his suffering, he's going to be silent.

And it's not the silence of his guilt. You know the way if you catch a child, I've got three kids, getting a wee bit older now, but I mean, when they were younger and they were caught red-handed, just as when I was caught red-handed as a kid, and you're asked about something and you can't say anything.

The silence of guilt. That wasn't Jesus. Jesus. Because he was not guilty of what he was going to suffer. You and I were guilty of what he was going to suffer.

[25 : 05] He was there as the representative. He is the one who is going to take the penalty that we were due so that we might receive the peace with God that he alone can secure.

He is the proxy, if you like. Some of you may know what it is. If you have somebody who has a proxy vote in a shareholders meeting, well, they go there in place of somebody to represent them and they go there to vote on their behalf.

They're physically there in the room and they're acting there on behalf of somebody else in the room. And Jesus, if you like, was the ultimate proxy. He's there in that location that we ought to be and he's there representing us facing the punishment, the penalty, the suffering that my sin caused. My sin of today. My sin of tomorrow. My sin of the years up until this point. His unique suffering that we can't enter into was representative.

His unique suffering that we can't enter into was also voluntary. in the sense that he had chosen to take part in this mission that he, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, developed in eternity and put into place in time, he willingly chose to bear the consequences of our sin in this way.

[26 : 45] We know it was voluntary because Jesus made it clear it was voluntary. Jesus, when he spoke about in different ways in different places about what was going to happen to him, he made clear that he wasn't going to simply be murdered.

I mean, that would have been an ideal scenario for his enemies. It's not that Jesus was going to come into this world and he was going to die at some point, whether early on in life, whether, you know, when the life expectancy of that generation or live longer and surrounded by those who loved

him, he wasn't going to breathe this last in that way.

No, no. Jesus knew that coming into this world, he would come and he would die. And he tells us in John chapter 10 in verse 17 and 18, he says, for this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.

Jesus became increasingly aware that of all that was going to be involved in that great culmination of a sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

[28:11] John at the start, John the Baptist at the start of the gospel identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who was going to take away the sin of the world. Well, what happens to lambs that had to take away sin?

Well, lambs had to die. And as it became increasingly aware for the Savior, as he grew in stature with men and with God, as he worshipped Sabbath by Sabbath in the local synagogue and as he absorbed more and more of what was being revealed in the Old Testament and it became clearer and clearer to him that exactly what was going to be involved with him and he was sent out at exactly the right time in that public ministry and he lived his life according to that timeline set by his father.

There was almost a drumbeat through the Gospel of John that his hour has not yet come, his time has not yet come, his time has not yet come, but now his time had come because he had come voluntarily as part of this eternal plan of salvation.

It's not that he's gone rogue and he's doing something that the Father and the Holy Spirit are not in agreement with. It's not that he's been press-ganged either into a particular path that he didn't want to be a part of.

It's not that he's been press-ganged by his Father. There is a voluntary willingness on the part of the Savior to come into this world to be that Lamb of God, to take away your sin, to take away my sin, to bring us back to God.

[29:52] And in his suffering that we cannot relate to, parts that in some vague, loose way that we can, but there's parts that we can't, then his unique suffering he knew was going to be rewarded because he knew that his suffering was in that sense not going to be the end.

He told his disciples repeatedly with increasing clarity in the detail that he's going to be betrayed, he's going to be arrested, he's going to be crucified, and then three days later he will rise.

I mean, the enemies of Jesus picked up on that detail. That's why they wanted to make sure that there was some way of guarding the tomb that nobody could say that his body was stolen. And so they put as good a guard as they could do.

It didn't make any difference though, did it? Because he did rise. Jesus knew that there was going to be a reward in that sense.

that his breathing his last, his committing his soul into the hands of his heavenly father that was not the end. It tells us later on in the letter to Hebrews, but for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross.

[31:08] What was the joy set before him? Well, remarkably, if you're in Christ Jesus this morning, the joy that was set before him is what you see in the mirror.

that you as part of the redeemed people of God who will one day visibly see the glory that Jesus had before this world began.

That we will be with him forevermore. That we are part of the joy that was set before him. That he would then endure the cross.

That he would face the abandonment. That he would suffer like no one else did because his suffering was on that physical level. It was on that emotional level but primarily it was on that spiritual level.

His unique suffering on our behalf as our representative as the one who did this voluntarily as the one who knew he would be rewarded.

[32:10] So what does this mean for us? well surely what this means for us is that this is one of these passages where our response is to bow down in worship in loving adoration of the man of sorrows who took our sorrows to take away sorrow for us so that we might know what it is to be in a living relationship with him and our maker with his spirit dwelling within us now and forevermore.

We bow down we worship and I suppose in many ways what we do is we respond in the way Paul wanted the apostle Paul when he's communicating this message from Jesus to the congregation in Rome he spends the first 11 chapters talking about the wonder of God's salvation and what God has done for us and trying to make it clear just the magnitude and the magnificence of the work of God on our behalf on our behalf people like us who didn't deserve anything and after 11 chapters of explaining that we have in our scripture as to what God has done he says I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship in other words if we know about this unique suffering of the saviour on our behalf then life changes and it changes by being awed and seeking to love and to live for and to serve this saviour who loved us and who gave himself for us
Amen May God bless these thoughts to us