

The Silent Sufferer

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” — Isaiah 53:7

According to the old saying, speech is silver, silence is golden. Of the Lord Jesus Christ it was said, “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46). His speech is silver. When that speech suddenly ceases, we must stop and ask why, for our Saviour’s silence is as significant as His speech. As we read the account of His trial, scourging, and crucifixion we are wrapped in the golden silence of the cross. As Isaiah 53:7 puts it, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

Here the full meaning of Christ’s stillness is revealed. There has never been a more eloquent silence. We may learn three simple yet sublime truths from it.

The Lord Jesus Christ willingly gave Himself to be the ransom for His people.

We read, “He was oppressed.” The Hebrew word translated “oppressed” has a wide range of meaning. It carries the idea of driving or impelling. Other forms of the word appear in our English Bible as “oppressor” (Job 3:18; Zechariah 9:8; 10:4); “driver” (Job 39:7); and “taskmasters” (Exodus 5:6). In the light of these, many take the expression “He was oppressed” to mean simply that Christ was driven, vexed, and ill-treated by men and patiently bore it all. This is all very true, but it fails to recognize a very significant aspect of the Bible’s usage of the Hebrew word, namely “to exact a tribute or ransom” (Deuteronomy 15:2, 3; 2 Kings 23: 35; and compare Daniel 11:20, “a raiser of taxes”).

Thus the reference in Isaiah 53:7 is to something exacted from Christ as a ransom. Indeed, the previous verse states, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” So the plain teaching of verse 7 is that God exacted a full payment of our debt of sin from Christ. What an awful price He paid on our behalf! And He paid it willingly. That is clear from the next statement of Isaiah.

“He was afflicted.” The verb means to be afflicted, oppressed, or made to labour. But the Hebrew text inserts the pronoun *hu* to make the clause especially emphatic. We may well translate it, “He willingly humbled Himself” or “He willingly submitted Himself to pay the price”—a truth established by many other places in Scripture (Matthew 20:28; John 10:11, 15-18; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25ff; 1 Timothy 2:6). Thus Christ willingly gave Himself as a ransom. All that was due to God and His law because of our sin was exacted of Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ paid this ransom by becoming our atoning sacrifice.

We have two wonderful statements: “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter” and “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” The sheep before its shearers reminds us of the covering Christ provides for us by the perfect obedience He rendered to the law in His *life*. The lamb brought to the slaughter tells us that in His *death* Christ provides a full discharge of our debt to God.

Both are essential to the atonement. Christ lived vicariously—all His submission to the law was on our behalf and in our place. And he died for us—all His suffering was for us and in our place. Naturally it is the great consummation of His atoning work at Calvary that gets most attention in Scripture. The Old Testament constantly refers to lambs as offerings for sin. The New Testament forcefully identifies Christ as “the lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 5:12).

This is the heart of the gospel: Christ paid our ransom by His willing sacrifice on Calvary. His sufferings were not merely sympathetic sufferings. They were substitutionary sufferings. He offered to God a “propitiation” (Romans 3:25), a sacrifice to appease divine wrath, on the merit of which we now have our sins expiated and so enjoy reconciliation with God.

We must note one final truth in Isaiah 53:7.

The Lord Jesus Christ’s silence in suffering shows His fitness to be our ransom and our redeemer.

Twice we read that in His deepest agony He opened not his mouth.

He had nothing ill to say about God. He accepted all His dealings with Him. Even Job, the most patient of fallen men, could not do this.

He had nothing to say against us. He uttered not a word of condemnation against, or even exasperation at, the sinners whose wickedness had brought Him to the cruel tree.

He did not revile His revilers. “When he was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). He meekly “endured such contradiction of sinners against himself” (Hebrews 12:3).

All this shows how utterly unlike fallen man Jesus was. He was sinless. He needed no atonement for Himself and so was able to offer one for us.

Thus Christ is given to us as both an expiation and an example. While we cannot be saved by seeking to follow the example of Christ, but must receive by faith the gift of salvation through the imputation of His righteousness (Romans 5:17-19), once we are saved we should never forget that “Christ . . . suffered for us, leaving us an example, that [we] should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). ■



by ALAN CAIRNS

What the Resurrection Means to Us

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

— 1 Corinthians 15:20

The fact that Christ’s tomb was empty brought fear and dread to the hosts of hell and, strangely enough, *sorrow* to the heart of one of Christ’s most devoted disciples. Mary Magdalene drew near to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away. Her first thought was that somebody had stolen the body of Christ. The tomb was empty, and Mary was broken-hearted.

She came to a wrong conclusion about the empty tomb, and it left her swimming in an ocean of grief. It wasn’t until she actually saw the risen Christ that her whole countenance, indeed, her whole life changed! And that is just what God’s people need to have a vision of today—the risen King. Consider the blessings that flow to God’s people from the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

First, *the resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the believer’s resurrection*. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:20, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.”

What does he mean by “firstfruits”?

That word takes us back to the Old Testament system of worship (Ex. 23; Lev. 23) where you will find that there was an offering presented at the Feast of Harvest called the offering of “firstfruits.” The Israelite was to bring the first sheaf of the harvest to God as a thank-offering. And that first sheaf was to the Israelite a statement of his assurance that there was going to be a reaping of the whole harvest. It was the first of many sheaves that were to follow. The apostle is saying, therefore, that this earth is like a great field, a field of graves. But one day this field is going to yield a great harvest of glorified bodies. And by rising from the dead, Christ is the “first-fruits” of that harvest. Simply put, the resurrection of Christ is a pledge from God that all of those who are “in Christ” will also rise again from the dead.

There will come a day when that very dust will reorganize. It will come together again in a new body, and that body will come up out of whatever grave it is in and meet Christ in the air, and “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” It is this truth that moved Paul to write in this same chapter, “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

Of course, this all sounds like fairy tales to the lost, but by faith in God’s Word Christians know that it is true and is certain as God Himself. Death, for the child of God, is nothing to fear. It is but a “sleep.” We are only saying “goodnight” to our loved ones who die in Christ. We shall certainly see them again “in the morning.” Why? Because the risen Christ is victor over death.

Second, the fact that Christ is risen from the dead means that *He is the source of the Christian’s spiritual life*. The apostle Paul stated in Romans 6:11 that Christians are “alive unto God through Jesus Christ.” He put it this way in Galatians 2:20: “I live,

yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Our spiritual life comes directly from Christ’s own resurrected life. So when your own spiritual life begins to grow dim, get yourself to the One who gave you that life in the first place.

The resurrection of Christ also declares that our spiritual life will never come to an end. If my spiritual life comes from Christ’s life, then it can only cease when His life ceases. But Paul said, “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, death hath no more dominion over him” (Romans 6:9). And since death no longer has dominion over Christ, it no longer has dominion over Christ’s people. For our “life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

How often the devil seeks to rob the believer of joy and comfort by getting him to continually doubt his eternal destiny, to make him afraid that one day he is going to fall away from Christ and perish in his sin. But in order for that to happen, my friend,

somebody has got to come up with a way to kill Christ again and *keep him dead!* Ah, but that can never be! “He lives forever with His saints to reign!”

Finally, *Christ’s resurrection from the dead is the guarantee that Christ’s people will be made holy*.

Paul states in Romans 6:10 of Christ, “For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.” If Christ’s life is in every child of God, then that means in no uncertain terms that they also will live unto God. After all, it is Christ living His life in them. And that is exactly why Paul went on to say in this same chapter that sin shall not have dominion over the Lord’s people.

It does *not* mean that we will never sin. Although it is the life of Christ in us, that life is still in a sinful body. It is opposed by this sin nature that plagues all of God’s people, and that will plague us until the day we see Christ and are made like Him (1 John 3:2). But it *does* mean that however feeble and however slow the progress may seem, Christ is living out His life unto God in us. That means that Christ’s views will become more and more *my* views. His feelings will become *my* feelings; and His will, *my* will.

This is a glorious truth! While it should put fear into the heart of every false professor of Christianity, it should cause every child of God to rejoice in Christ. Your sanctification is as certain as your justification because Christ is risen from the dead.

How this truth should draw every believer to closer communion with the Saviour to draw from Him the “power of His resurrection” that he might more and more “live unto God.” Christ is alive forevermore. Believe it. Rest in it. Use it. ■



by **JOHN WAGNER**