

THE MESSIAH WILL WIN FOR YOU**ISAIAH 53:10-12**

Boxing was a much bigger sport when I was a kid than it is today. When I was a youngster, I followed the big fights between Smokin' Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali for the heavyweight championship of the world. I was a Joe Frazier fan for whatever reason. Here's the funny thing about some boxing matches. They don't always clearly answer the question of who's the best fighter. Sometimes boxers fight each other several times and neither one wins all the bouts. Ali and Frazier fought each other three times with Ali winning two of them. My knowledge of boxing is limited, but I do know fights often end in what's called a split decision. A boxing match has three judges. A split decision occurs when two judges determine Boxer A won the fight while the third judge concludes that, no, Boxer B actually won. A split decision leaves unanswered questions about who really won the fight. Rather than being an absolutely decisive result, a split decision means there was no clear cut winner.

A Portrait of Jesus Before He Came. This morning I'm concluding a series of messages based on Isaiah 52 and 53. Some 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah, a Jewish prophet, gave a very unique portrait of the Messiah – a special deliverer God was going to send into the world. Jesus fulfilled everything Isaiah predicted about who the Messiah would be and what He would do. Over the last five Sundays, we've seen together that Isaiah provided an amazing and incredible prediction of Jesus' suffering on the cross and its implications hundreds of years before it actually happened.

The cross was the biggest fight of all time. This was and is the spiritual heavyweight championship fight of all time and eternity. Nearly 2,000 years ago, the most decisive battle was fought and won. Now, here's the irony. From one perspective, the cross looked like a total and complete defeat for the Kingdom of God. It looked like God lost by a clear knockout punch. It looked like the devil, sin, and evil triumphed. But from Isaiah's perspective exactly the opposite was and is true. In v. 10-12 of chapter 53, Isaiah tells us the cross wasn't a defeat for the Kingdom of God or for the Messiah. It was, it is, and it will forever be, the greatest victory ever won. At the cross and empty tomb, Jesus won totally, absolutely, decisively, finally, and forever. Let's read the entire passage one more time, but then focus on v. 10-12.

There was no split decision at the cross. Jesus delivered a cosmic knockout punch to the jaw of evil that was so powerful that it was like lifting the devil over the ropes and right out of the ring! The cross wasn't a defeat for Jesus; it was an incomparable victory. As ironic as it may seem, every time you look at a cross, you're looking at a symbol of the greatest victory ever won. It has a past, present, and future dimension. It's a win that was, that is, and that will be in its effects. It's impact, value, and results only get bigger and more wonderful a time goes on. Let's remember, first, that...

THE CROSS WAS AN IMMEDIATE TRIUMPH.

How is that true? At the very least, the day Jesus died looked like a disaster for the Kingdom of God. Consider this. Because of the cross, the power of sin and the devil

was broken in one, mighty decisive punch. How so? The guilt of human sin was paid for completely when Jesus breathed His last breath and died. Isaiah clearly saw that the Messiah would be our substitute before God. When Jesus died, God the Father looked down upon God the Son and accepted His death as the appropriate penalty for your sin and mine. As a direct result, the way was now open for you and me to have our sins forgiven. The way was now open for us to enter into a new, living, and eternal relationship with God Himself. We can begin to experience eternal life right now. This was no cosmic split decision. It was an immediate, overwhelming knockout punch – utterly decisive and complete in its scope and dimensions.

Isaiah clearly said here that Jesus' death was God's will. He said, "It's what God had in mind all along, to crush him with pain." (Is. 53:10 MSG) This wasn't God the Father being heartless and cruel toward His Son, Jesus. Instead, this was the only way to win this spiritual war and bring lost human beings back into a proper relationship with their Creator. Only a totally sinless substitute could open the door to reconciliation with the God of the universe. Isaiah said, "And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins." (Is. 53:11 NLT) Never forget an all-important truth: Jesus was never a victim at the cross. The cross was His chosen destiny as the Messiah.

Jesus had no desire to go through the spiritual and physical agony of the cross. True enough. Nevertheless, He threw Himself with His whole heart into His own suffering and death knowing full well it was the only way to bring sinful human beings back to His Father. The people who saw Jesus die thought God was punishing Him. God was indeed punishing Jesus, but not for His own sins. So, the crowd was right about what was happening, but wrong about the cause. Jesus was punished for your sins and mine, not His own because He had none to punish. I don't think the devil ever saw it coming – this decisive knockout punch. He thought he'd won some great victory against God that day. But when Jesus yielded up His spirit and breathed His last – as odd as it may sound – God's grace and mercy knocked the devil out cold.

There's a story about a young man who didn't want to serve in the army of Napoleon Bonaparte, the French emperor. When he was drafted, a friend volunteered to go in his place. The substitution was made. Sometime later, this friend was killed in battle. Because of a clerical error, the first young man was drafted yet again. He told the enlistment officers, "You can't draft me. I'm legally dead. I legally died on the battlefield in the person of my friend." The officers argued with him, but he insisted they look at their records. Sure enough, there on the roll was the man's name with his deceased friend's name right next to it. The issue went to Napoleon himself to resolve. He issued this conclusion. "Through a substitute, this man has not only fought, but has died in his country's service. No man can die more than once; therefore, the law has no claim on him." 2,000 years ago, Jesus died in order to pay the penalty for your sins and mine. He literally died in our place. And because of Him, your name is now written in Heaven's Book of Life with Jesus' Name written right beside it. No controversy. No questions. No unresolved issues. And no split decision. It's done. Finished. Over. Completed. Jesus' triumph at the cross was immediate. But here's another truth.

THE CROSS IS AN IMMANENT TRIUMPH.

What does that mean? The victory Jesus won at the cross isn't just something that has value only in the past. It has incredible and ongoing significance and force right now in the present. It impacts every moment of every day. Notice again what Isaiah said about this coming Messiah. "Though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand." (Is. 53:10 NIV) I believe Isaiah was pointing to or implying the resurrection. After all, if the Messiah stayed dead, then how would He be able to see His descendants? Every now and then, someone puts out a book or a movie that imagines Jesus was secretly married and had children. But Jesus has only spiritual descendants. Who are they? Each and every man, woman, boy, and girl over the last 2,000 years who has received the gift of eternal life by putting his or her trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. As a result, they've been born again by the Holy Spirit and adopted into God's forever family. And Jesus has been watching that family grow larger every year for 2,000 years.

Before the world was even created, God chose you to be His son or daughter. He then sent His Son into the world to die for your sins. He rejoiced the day you were born physically. And all Heaven rejoiced the day you were born again spiritually. Notice what else Isaiah said about the Messiah here. "When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied." (Is. 53:11 NLT) Satisfied! Mission accomplished! Victory achieved! The cross of Jesus can never be some old, irrelevant historical fact we look back on every now and then. It matters in your life and mine today and every day. Because of the cross, you enjoy and experience God's grace today, God's love today, God's power today, and God's peace today. Today and every day!

Notice something else in Isaiah's words. "He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels." (Is. 53:12 NLT) The literal Hebrew right there conveys the sense of ongoing, continuous action. When you intercede for someone, it means you intervene in a positive way on their behalf. For example, two friends have a falling out, but a third friend intercedes to repair the broken relationship. He or she intervenes. Because of our sins, we offended an absolutely holy God. Jesus interceded on our behalf. The cross was an intervention. But it didn't stop at the cross. The Bible teaches Jesus continues to intercede and intervene on our behalf today and tomorrow.

Why do we need Jesus continually interceding and intervening in our lives? We continue to need forgiveness. We continue to need comfort and strength in times of heartache and struggle. We continue to need the power of the Holy Spirit at all times and especially when we sense our own weakness. At this very moment, Jesus is interceding on our behalf before His Father's throne in Heaven. The Bible says, "And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us – who was raised to life for us! – is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us." (Rom. 8:34 MSG) It also says, "He's there from now to eternity to save everyone who comes to God through him, always on the job to speak up for them." (Heb. 7:25 MSG)

Steve Winger's last college test was a final exam in a logic class known for its difficulty. To help the students pass their test, the professor told them they could bring as much information to the exam as they could fit on one piece of notebook paper. Most students crammed as many facts as possible onto one 8-1/2 x 11 inch piece of paper. But one student walked into the classroom, put a piece of notebook paper on the floor and had a fellow student stand on the paper. Now this student was in an advanced class on logic so the questions on this final exam were easy and already known to him. The student told Steve everything he needed to know. Steve was the only student who got an "A." The ultimate final exam will come when we stand before God and He asks us, "Why should I let you into Heaven?" On our own, none of us can pass that exam. All of our own attempts to earn eternal life fall far short. But each of us does have Someone who will stand in for us. His Name is Jesus.

Because of what Jesus did and does, you're being forgiven this very moment. You continue to be accepted this very moment. You are being made whole spiritually this very moment. You are being empowered and strengthened this very moment. The cross was no split decision. It was and it is total victory. So, claim that victory, enjoy that victory, live into that victory, and live out that victory. It was an immediate triumph. It is an immanent triumph. And here's a final truth to consider about this triumph.

THE CROSS IS AN INEVITABLE TRIUMPH.

Think with me about that word "inevitable." It means that while something hasn't happened yet; nevertheless, it certainly will happen. When something is inevitable, it means something will happen in the future that can't be stopped or avoided. How does that apply to the cross of Jesus? The victory He won there hasn't been fully realized or accomplished yet. More wonderful results are to come from this greatest of triumphs. And these wonderful results can't be stopped, stalled, or avoided. They're inevitable! Isaiah implied inevitability. He has God saying about the Messiah, "Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong." (Is 53:12 NIV) Isaiah depicted the Messiah as a great military conqueror collecting the spoils or the "booty" of war. Another translation puts it this way, "I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier." (Is. 53:12 NLT) Jesus' triumph at the cross is inevitable.

It's clear that the total, complete triumph of Jesus hasn't been fully realized yet. There's still plenty of evil, sin, and suffering in this world, isn't there? So what is Isaiah envisioning here and when will it happen? The Bible makes it quite clear that Jesus will, in fact, return again to Earth physically and literally. It says, "So also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him." (Heb. 9:28 NLT) Isaiah predicted the first coming of the Messiah some 700 years before the actual fact. Was he right about that? Absolutely. Did it actually happen? Certainly it happened exactly as he predicted. We can be confident, then, that Jesus will come again a second time. A day of absolute and final victory is coming in the future.

Now, it's my personal opinion some followers of Jesus spend far too much time and energy trying to figure out exactly when Jesus will come again and what events will precede it. Here's what Jesus said, "But the exact day and hour? No one knows that, not even heaven's angels, not even the Son. Only the Father knows." (Mt. 24:36 MSG) The events preceding Jesus' Second Coming are open to many different interpretations by people who love God's Word equally. I'm not saying we should be ignorant of these matters by any means. But neither does it need to become the focus of your life. Jesus' advice about His Second Coming was simple and succinct. "You must also be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected." (Mt. 24:44 NLT) Don't waste your time poring over all those prophetic calendars offered to you. Don't become anxious about world events. Instead, just be ready – every day and at any time. Let's keep a sense of immediacy in our attitude about Jesus' return.

I appreciate the attitude of a little girl I heard about. She and her mother had just heard a message about the Second Coming of Jesus at church. On the way home, she asked her mother, "Mommy, do you believe Jesus will come back again." "Yes, honey, I certainly do." "Could He come back this week?" "Yes." "Could He come back today?" "Yes, I suppose He could." "Could He come back next hour?" "Well, yes." "Could Jesus come back in the next few minutes?" "Yes, dear!" There was a bit of a pause as the little girl processed this information. Then, she asked, "Mommy, could you comb my hair?" Amusing? Sure, but that little girl was understanding more about what it means to be ready and to live expectantly for Jesus' return.

If Jesus returned before the end of this worship service, would you be ready? He's not asking you to live fearfully. Instead, He wants us to live faithfully before Him each and every day. He invites us to live a committed, devoted, and surrendered life before Him each and every day. One day every follower of Jesus will share in the inevitable triumph of Jesus. No split decision. This will be a knock out win – a total, complete, absolute, and final triumph.

Back in the 1960 campaign for president, John F. Kennedy liked to close his campaign speeches with a story about a Colonel Davenport who was the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives. One day, way back in 1789, the sky over Hartford, Connecticut got very dark and scary. As the representatives were going about their business, some of them glanced out the window. They became increasingly afraid and concerned about the power of this tremendous storm bearing down on them. It looked so wild and dangerous that some of them genuinely feared for their lives. Several made calls for an immediate adjournment so all of them could seek shelter. But Colonel Davenport stood up and said, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching or not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought."

We live in a world that seems to be getting darker and stormier spiritually and morally every day. It can look downright scary out there at times. But, follower of Jesus, you are called to let your light shine in that darkness as you work, watch, and wait. The Messiah has won, is winning, and will win. The cross was an immediate triumph. The

cross is an immanent triumph. And the cross is an inevitable triumph. We get to share in that victory. Jesus invites all of His followers – including you and me - to join Him in that greatest of all triumphs.