LD 15; Isaiah 53:1-6; II Cor. 5:16-21; The Suffering Servant’s Sacrifice I. The Extent of His Suffering II. The Purpose of His Suffering

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, why is there so much suffering in this world? Why is there so much pain so that it is safe to say that no one is immune. Even if you have access to the best doctors and medicine, you still get sick! Why do things break down? You can purchase the most expensive house and still you have repairs and upkeep. Well, the reason that there is suffering- the reason that our bodies and the things of this world break down is because of the presence of sin. Sin has a way of infecting everything and everyone; so that nothing remains pure and untouched. As we know, all suffering is the consequence of the fall. We are living in a world stained by sin and it affects every aspect of life. We have come to expect this. But there is one person who suffered in a way unlike everyone else. One man whose suffering earned him the title- the suffering servant. This morning, we considered Enoch his being spared from death. Tonight, we see Jesus who was in many ways born to die. He could not be spared from death is we are to be saved! Having considered the person and nature of Jesus Christ, we next turn to His work. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ the suffering servant endured a lifetime or sorrow for the sake of our salvation.

**I. The Extent of His Suffering**

In our first point, we consider the extent of Christ’s suffering. How much, when, and to what extent did He suffer. The suffering of Jesus is not something that limited to a specific time and place. Although it is true that there were moments of increased and heightened suffering, the fact remains that this thorn of sorrow accompanied His entire life. Our QA 37 opens by saying that Jesus suffered during his whole life on earth. Starting at His conception and birth, Jesus entered into this world accompanied by sorrow. The incarnation itself is a great act of humility. As we read in II Cor. 5, we once regarded Jesus as one in the flesh. And also in Isaiah 53:2, He grew up without form or majesty. No beaty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As Jesus entered this world, He came to the lowly and was born of the poor. Joseph and Mary were in no way wealthy or privileged. Jesus was not born in a cradle in the palace, but in a manger in a cattle stall. And this theme of suffering followed His entire life. He was constantly misunderstood; at times his life was in danger from the crowds or the rulers. He suffered in His body- as He hungered and thirsted. His soul was burdened with grief as He wept by the graveside. He came to His own but His own received him not. His own disciples fled from him, and he was betrayed by a close companion. Added to this, we read of His spiritual anguish. As Matthew 26:38 puts it, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death. So His entire life speaks of the story of suffering- a man of sorrows. From the cradle to the grave, from His conception to His last breath. But there is also a definite crescendo of suffering at the end of His life as well. As QA 37 puts it, especially at the end of His life. During his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, his sweat became as drops of blood. The heavy burden of our sins were pressing upon Him. The cup of God’s wrath heavy in His hands. And then came the cross. That cruel tree upon which His body was hung. And why did Jesus need to be hung on a tree? As QA 39 answers, His crucifixion proves that He took on the curse for me! He shouldered my debt- taking my place. He was forsaken by the Father, men shook their head at him. They scoffed and mocked- saying that He could save others but not Himself. Treated as if He was the worst offender of all! One who was not worthy of life- such a wicked rebel that He needed to be removed from the land of the living. What added to the extent of this suffering was that He was innocent. Wrongly and unjustly condemned. It is one thing to suffer when you have done wrong- it is quite another to suffer for doing what is right and good! So the innocence and holiness of Jesus served to heighten the extent of His suffering! When He sought only our good- when He obeyed and submitted to His Father- still He suffered! His union with the Father now gives way to His being forsaken. He was cut off from the land of the living, although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in His mouth as Isaiah 53 states. As Ursinus summarizes for us, “Christ suffering included the setting aside of the highest joy, the infirmities of our nature, extreme want and poverty, injuries and reproach, temptations of the devil, a reproachful death, bitter anguish of the soul and the experience of the wrath of God.” Now what can we learn from this? Why must we acknowledge the suffering of Jesus in such a pointed way? Well, the fact is that sin is ugly! God despises sin- and it arouses His just anger and wrath! How bad must sin be in order to demand the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in order for that sin to be forgiven?! Far too often we think little of sin- we fail to grasp the ugliness of it! It doesn’t bother us- we have grown used to the stench of rotting flesh and it no longer offends us! But sin is offensive- it is an affront to God! Its very presence calls for the sword to fall! And yet, Jesus chose to walk this path! He was willing to become sin- to be treated as the worst of sinners! He was willing to become accursed- to be forsaken by the Father! Such is the love of the Son of Man for His people!

**II. The Purpose of His Suffering**

Now that we have considered the nature and timing of Jesus’ suffering, in our second point we consider the purpose of His suffering. What did the suffering of Jesus secure? When we are suffering, it is a blessing to have someone walk with us. Merciful and compassionate, we do have a High Priest who knows our weakness. However, with Jesus being the suffering servant we have something more than just compassion. Jesus takes our place in the suffering! Imagine for a moment the difference between someone holding your hand while you had a root canal and the person actually having the root canal. As helpful as it would be to have a friend holding your hand- it is infinitely better for you if that other person actually took your place! Well, this is what Jesus does! As QA 37 puts is, Jesus sustained suffering in his body and soul so that he might deliver us from eternal condemnation. Look at the Great Exchange as it is called in Isaiah 53. Starting in 53:4, he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace. He is beaten and whipped while we are healed! The more He is inflicted- the more we are made whole! Not only is it true that Jesus did not deserve any of these sorrows- it is also true that He willingly took them all on Himself for our sake! This is called the passive obedience of Jesus Christ- He took our place under the wrath and curse of God! Since the just demands of God’s Law must be satisfied, the only way for us to be pardoned is if another takes our place. This is a basic outline of what is called Substitutionary Atonement. As our reading from II Cor. 5:21 says- for our sake, God made Him who knew no sin to be sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Now that we understand why Jesus had to suffer, next we consider the reason He had to suffer a specific way. First, why did Jesus have to suffer at the hands of Pontius Pilate? Would it have been enough just to suffer the general abuse of Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders? Was the beating, spitting, flogging, and scorn not enough? Why this whole legal drama as recorded in John 19? Well, QA 38 clarifies that the reason behind the declaration of Pilate was twofold. First, Pilate would be the one to declare that Jesus was innocent. In fact, Pilate would make this declaration 3 times- I find no fault in this man. So even the rulers of men would be forced to concede the fact that there was no fault or rebellion to be found with Jesus. He was innocent- and yet he would be condemned. Fearing the crowds, Pilate would also be the one to approve his execution. He would deliver Jesus over to them to be crucified. Jesus was wrongly- unjustly- condemned by an earthly judge. Just a few verses earlier, Jesus clarifies that the only reason that Pilate had authority was because God had given him that authority. In this way, Pilate is speaking with his God-given authority. As it could be said- God is uses the voice of Pilate to declare both aspect- first that Jesus is innocent and second- that Jesus will still be condemned to the cross. Having no sin of His own, Jesus is declared guilty! There is a legal event taking place- the innocent are condemned so that the guilty might be free from the judgment that was to fall on us!

Second, why did Jesus have to suffer on the cross? What is unique about this specific form or location of suffering? As you will remember, earlier attempts had been made on Jesus life. Right out of the gate, you will remember that Herod searched for Him as a child in order to kill Him. Later on, the crowds would seek to stone Him or cast Him off the side of a cliff. But all of these other attempts on His life would not be successful, because Jesus had to be crucified! He had to die on a cross! Why? Well, as QA 39 makes clear, death by crucifixion is a picture of the curse. As quoted from Dt. 21, those who are hung on a tree are cursed- a hanged man is cursed by God. The cross itself, is a testament to the status of the one on the cross. Since Jesus was on the cross, He must then have been under the wrath and curse of God! This is needed- it is significant because we in our sins by nature are under the wrath and curse of God. But Jesus, taking our place, becomes a curse for us! He was forsaken so that we might be accepted! He was cursed so that we might be blessed! Even the very word of Jesus on the cross put this question before us. Turn to Matthew 27:46. Note His question, why have you forsaken me? How would you answer this question? Why did the Father forsake His Son? Why is the suffering of Jesus necessary? Why have you forsaken me? Well, the Father forsook the Son because the Father loved the world- He loved His sheep who were lost in sin! The Son had to be forsaken in order for us to be accepted! Why did Jesus suffer- so that He might deliver us from eternal condemnation and gain for us God’s grace, righteousness and life! From the words of Pilate to the cross upon which He hung- everything pointed to this truth! The innocent are condemned- the suffering servant is cursed- so that we might be set free!

The suffering of Jesus is a source of great comfort and encouragement. Not only as our elder brother do we have the benefit of a compassionate and merciful High Priest, but as the suffering servant Jesus is also the Lamb who suffered in our place! Whatever suffering- whatever hardship we endure in this life- if we are joined to Christ by faith- is not a payment for our sins! Our struggles are not a foretaste of eternal condemnation- not if Jesus has already drained the cup of God wrath for us! As our theme states: Jesus Christ the suffering servant endured a lifetime or sorrow for the sake of our salvation. So may our hearts be moved by these two things- first may we all see our own depravity- the seriousness of our sins which necessitated the cross! The gross and repulsive nature of sin which drove Christ to be crucified! And the second thing that strikes us is this- look at the love of Christ! That He would be willing to drink the cup of God’s wrath- to be forsaken by the Father- so that we might loved and blessed! What great love Jesus- the suffering servant- has for us- that He might be willing to be condemned so that we might be counted righteous!