

A D V E N T 2 0 1 7

Born IS
THE
King

So in our study of 1 Corinthians we have been learning about the nature of true gospel power which to the world appears as weakness. We are approaching Christmas this year looking at the birth narrative through that lens. And it's a helpful lens. It helps us interpret what would otherwise be bewildering. Because the birth narrative, his life and the death of Jesus Christ is not what we were expecting. And believe me there were expectations. There were preconceived notions of how this thing should go down.

The story of the entire OT is a story of waiting and anticipation and hoping for the coming of Messiah. It's like everyone is seated in the concert hall waiting for that curtain to lift. And the opening pages of the gospels is the lifting of that curtain. The Messiah is born! The great reveal that the prophets had predicted clear back in Genesis is here. And you just can't wait to get that first glimpse. And what you see is an utter disappointment. You see weakness, lowliness and stigma.

Everyone was anticipating, but nobody was prepared for what was

revealed when the curtain was lifted.

To get an idea of the kind of upset expectations, let me give you an analogy. These days, big companies hold press conferences to reveal their next product. Imagine if we get hyped up for the next phone release from one of the major players. And there's all this drama that's behind it. It's going to be the greatest phone you've ever seen. They've been working on this behind the scenes for the last 10 years. And we get little intentional leaks about the statistics on this new device.

- It uses a totally different screen technology,
- you'll never have to charge it,
- it weighs less than a table fork,
- it's so cheap, it costs less than a cup off coffee,
- it's solved all security problems.

And so everyone's hyped up and there's a date on the calendar. What's it going to be like?

And now imagine that this new thing is revealed, but everything we were expecting was upended. All the metrics we were prepared to use to assess the quality of this thing are not even applicable. And imagine, the CEO of the company comes out on stage and says, listen, this is the world's most productive device we have ever made. Our research says that if you purchase this device you will be 100 times more productive than the device in your pocket right now. And he pulls out a spiral notebook.

Now everything that was predicted about this new device is true. It's a new screen material. And it doesn't run out of batteries. And it's the lightest device ever made. It's incredibly inexpensive. But it's not impressive. You can't measure the screen in pixels or the battery in

mAh or the processor in ghz.

In a similar sort of way, everyone in their mind had an idea of what the Messiah would accomplish. He'd be this mighty warrior king. He'd take down Rome. Everyone thought they knew how he would exert his power and how he would influence the world. Everyone was sure they knew how he would bring about the salvation anticipated by the OT prophets.

But the NT introduced the technology of weakness. Here he is born in Bethlehem, this small town, to poverty-stricken parents with this horrible stigma of illegitimacy surrounding his birth, all of these like the searing of branding iron that would have been pressed into Jesus' reputation.

Rags to Ruins

And you may think to yourself, well I can understand why Messiah would be born with all these stigmas because we are being setup for one of those rags to riches stories. Right? But the story of Jesus is a story of stigma to worse stigma story. It's rags to ridicule. It's a rags to ruin story.

Jesus is going to live his life in absolute obscurity for 30 years. We know one event that happened to him when he was 12. That's it. Everything else has been forgotten. He's going to have a public ministry for 3 and 1/2 years and then he's going to be executed with 10 times the stigma he is born with.

So this is stigma in his birth is just the beginning. He ends with massive disgrace, stain, humiliation, scorn and reproach in crucifixion. The humiliation in Jesus' birth was a harbinger of the

even greater humiliation he would experience in his death. And that's what we want to focus on today. Last week we looked at the stigmas surrounding the birth of Jesus. Today we want to look at the stigmas surrounding his death.

And this is an absolutely appropriate Christmas theme. Many people have rightly observed that Christmas is preparation for Easter. Jesus came so that he might die. His birth would have no meaning if it weren't for his death. So turn in your Bible's to Is 53 and we are going to use this passage to tell us about three stigmas of his death.

3 Stigmas of Jesus' Death

Now when you open Isaiah 53 what you're looking at is one of the many prophecies that Isaiah gives concerning the Servant of the Lord. In Isaiah he reveals this somewhat mysterious figure who is to come in the future and he is going to bring the salvation of God. And we get little clues about what this person is going to be like.

And of all the servant songs (there are several) this is the most well known. It really is one of those places in the Bible where you feel like you need to take your shoes off because you're entering into sacred space. It is so amazing how predictive this text is.

Of course, the New Testament identifies the Servant of the Lord as Jesus himself. Over and over the NT writers are going to point back to this prophecy that was given 700 years earlier that spoke of the nature of this coming servant.

Let's look at Isaiah 53 verse 1 here.

Isaiah 53:1-2, Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

He's introducing this prophecy with a rhetorical question. Who has believed what he has heard from us? Implied answer: Nobody. Why won't you believe? Because honestly, it's too crazy to believe what I'm about to tell you about Messiah. And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed. To whom has the POWER of the Lord been revealed? Implied answer: everyone who listens to what I'm about to tell you.

Isaiah is saying, I am about to do this great reveal, this sneak preview concerning the arm of the Lord. That's a Hebraism for power. Your arm is where your power comes from. Behold the power of the Lord. Are you ready?

And what you expect next is a rider on a white horse. You expect some sort of military general or something like this. If you were to do a study on the power of the Lord in the Bible, what do you think you'd focus on. You'd look at the creation of the stars by God and you'd survey his omnipotence, his omniscience. You'd look at his miracle working power. That's what comes to mind when we think of

the power of the Lord.

But that's the kind of power being pictured here. What we see here is not a figure of amazing beauty, we don't see a figure of surpassing strength, we see rather a figure of weakness and stain and stigma.

3 STIGMAS OF JESUS' DEATH

1. The Stigma of Rejection

Look at verse 2

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

Isaiah 53:3, He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

What is this text trying to say? Is it trying to say that Jesus' appearance was not attractive? Was it saying he had a homely appearance or something like that? Maybe he was short in stature or not muscular or something like that?

Well, I don't think it's limited to that but it certainly could include his physical appearance. What this text is saying is that his very own people couldn't recognize their Savior because their minds were all trained to look someplace else. Think about it this way:

Adults always look at young people and they are eying them with a certain set of predictors. Let me see if I can size you up based on what I know about you and predict whether or not you will be successful.

- You have a type A personality.
- You went to this school.
- You have a sort of entrepreneurial spirit about you.
- You got these important internships.
- You're a risk taker.
- You got these SAT scores.
- You have these social skills

These are all indicators of future success. What this text is saying is that Jesus didn't have any of these.

- No money
- Wrong education
- No social connections
- Wrong set of friends
- No pedigree

He was utterly unimpressive.

He didn't have the FORM of majesty. You can hear in the word majesty the word major. That's where the words comes from. I want something major, something great, something powerful and Jesus didn't have that form.

We want the stunning, the astonishing, the impressive, the instantaneous. God delivered the ordinary. Here was a Messiah without beauty or majesty to attract you.

The simple, carnal rats of humanity didn't recognize their maker. Their eyes couldn't penetrate the veil of ordinariness. They were into the wrong form and passed him by without interest.

Jesus was rejected by his own people. That's hard. Not even your fellow countryman accept you. Do you remember when Jesus is before Pilate in John 18? Pilate asks him are you the king of the Jews? And Jesus said, "Did you ask this by your own accord or did others put this idea in your head?" And Pilate says, "Listen Jesus, am I a Jew? Your own nation and chief priests have delivered you over to me." In other words, I'm trying to figure out what you've done such that your own people would reject you?

It's one thing if Rome rejects you, but your own people have spit you out. What did you do?

The rejection Jesus experienced from the crowds and religious leaders was painful in its own right. But you want to talk about being acquainted with grief? Try being abandoned by your closest friends in your greatest hour of need.

This isn't prophesying the abandonment of Jesus by his disciples; it's a more general statement of his overall rejection. But his disciples' flight in his hour of need is certainly part of the picture, right?

One of the worst feelings in the world is to absolutely be stripped of all your strength, to have all the props in your life kicked out from

underneath you, to have the screws of the some incredibly difficult situation turned in upon your skull and your just screaming in your soul, help! You're completely vulnerable. You've lost all dignity. You're just crying like a baby. I need help from my friends, from my family, where's my mom who can comfort me?

And in that moment of absolute despair you look around and you watch you're all alone. You cry out, and in excitement you see your friend and it lights up your face but when your eyes meet your best friend turns his head and walks away. Just pure alone in your absolute greatest need. I always think about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane in this regard. He's told his disciples multiple times that he's going to Jerusalem to die. They wouldn't have it. They refused to believe it. They thought he was talking like a madman. Jesus we are here to setup the kingdom. So even in the anxiety leading up to Jerusalem, Jesus is alone.

And then they go into the garden of Gethsemane to pray and he says, "Man I need you guys to pray. I'm in the worst distress of my life." He comes back three times and every time his disciples are dead asleep. How discouraging.

And then the Romans come and arrest him. They all scatter. They flee like cockroaches in the daylight. Alone. So alone. Deathly alone.

All his best worldly friends look at him and hide their faces. What does that mean? They look and they can't bear to engage with him. What he's going through is too difficult. What it would require of them is too much so they just turn away and pretend it doesn't exist. There's that famous interchange between Jesus and Peter in the garden. Peter knows he's abandoned him but can't get himself to reengage. And so he walks away and weeps. Oh how painful to be

on the other side of that!

Jesus bore that stigma of rejection just like Isaiah 53 predicted.

3 STIGMAS OF JESUS' DEATH

1. The Stigma of Rejection
2. The Stigma of Condemnation

We get this picture in verse 7.

Isaiah 53:7, He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

When you read the gospel accounts of how Jesus was arrested, tried and sentenced, it really was like a lamb led to the slaughter. How does a lamb go? Willingly and without resistance.

The trials of Jesus on the way to his death were an absolute joke. We call this kind of thing a kangaroo court. That phrase was coined with this image of a kangaroo hopping over evidence that was in favor of the defendant. That's where we get the phrase "jumping to conclusions"

There are so many reasons Jesus' trial was illegal it's not even funny.

1. He was arrested in the middle of the night.

Why would they do that? Not because Jesus was hard to find. He taught every day in the synagogues. He was in plain sight daily. They didn't want the crowds to come to his defense. Jesus would have had many to come to his defense but they were all sleeping. It was a setup!

2. He was judged by the same people who accused him.

Now think about this. This is the case in our day and it was the case in Jesus' day. Any trial can be dismissed as a mistrial, or illegal, if it can be proven that there is prejudice against the individual being tried.

Jesus was both arrested and tried by those prejudiced against Him, and was not allowed opportunity to present His case. Further, His judges were the same individuals who bribed Judas! There's no possible way you can make the case that Jesus' judges were

impartial.

3. Trial was at night.

Jesus was drug before Annas the high priest in the middle of the night. The Talmud said explicitly that you could not hold trials after the sun went down.

Moses Maimonides (my-mo-mi-deez) who was a Jewish Rabbi during the middle ages, “The reason why the trial of a capital offense could not be held at night is because...the examination of such a charge is like the diagnosing of a wound—in either case a more thorough and searching examination can be made by daylight.”

4. The Trial was before the Sabbath

The Mishna says, “They shall not judge on the eve of the Sabbath, nor on any festival.”

5. The Trial can't be over in a single day.

Again, from the Mishna we learn,

“A criminal case resulting in the acquittal of the accused may terminate the same day on which the trial began. But if a sentence of death is to be pronounced, it cannot be concluded before the following day.”

And on and on we could go....

So Jesus is being shamed by the obvious injustice. You can imagine the desire to defend yourself and how frustrating it must be to know

that the evidence is false, that the conclusion is predetermined. But what can you do? They are all in on it. They are all smiling against you with knowing grins.

And Jesus' refusal to open his mouth is not stubborn pride. It is what Proverbs calls, "Not answering a fool according to his folly." It's being silent because you know it's a no win. You know nobody is listening.

Now there is a third stigma here and it's the most significant.

3 STIGMAS OF JESUS' DEATH

1. The Stigma of Rejection
2. The Stigma of Condemnation
3. The Stigma of Crucifixion

Of course the rejection, the condemnation, it's all leading to this ultimate stigma, the stigma of stigmas, his death on a cross. And we get glimpses of that in this passage.

Isaiah 53:4-6, Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-every one-to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:8, By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

Do you hear in these verses the torture of the cross.

- Pierced for our iniquities.
- By oppression and judgment he was taken away. That's a strong word. Killed

The cross as you know is the instrument of torture design by Romans to put down sedition and rebellion. It was very effective. Don't mess with Rome or you'll end up like that guy.

And that's why it was stigmatized so severely.

- The cross was Rome's way of leaving a permanent brand on you.
- Criminal, don't be like him.
- Whatever he represents, whatever he did, you take note.
- Rome has made a decree: men like him are worthy of death.

Crucifixions were always done in public places, in Jesus' case it was done at the city gate. This added to the shame. It's embarrassing to have others see you in your weakness. Jesus was beaten to the point of being unrecognized and then hung on a cross. Isaiah talks about this as well.

Isaiah 52:14, As many were astonished at you- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind-

His appearance was so marred his form became unrecognizable. The word translated astonished means to be shattered. The NIV

translated it appalled. It's actually a word that can be used when a city that has just been invaded and destroyed, turned to rubble. When it's used to describe a person it means to be appalled, to be so shattered by something they're looking at so as to want to vomit. What is it that makes them so shattered they want to vomit?

We're told his appearance was so disfigured; it was marred beyond human likeness. Here's what's happened to the Servant of the Lord. He has been so disfigured by violence and torture that he doesn't look human anymore. He doesn't even look human. To look at him is to be nauseated and need to vomit. This is the Servant of the Lord

He was hung on a tree, the worst stigma for Jews. Back in Deuteronomy 21 we are explicitly told that to be hung on a tree is to be cursed. They literally had this verse in their mind as they look at their so-called Savior marred and disfigured before him. There he was hung on a tree between two other criminals.

And he bowed his head and died. What can this possibly mean? Now does verse 53 make more sense?

Isaiah 53:1-2, Who has believed what he has heard
from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been
revealed?

Behold, world, the power of your God at work? Behold the power of
your Messiah! Do you see the power!

The Point

All we see is weakness. Weakness in his birth: economically, civilly,
socially. Weakness in his death: rejected, condemned, and horror of
horrors - crucified.

These weaknesses seem to be too large to overcome, don't they?
Jesus the pauper. Jesus the hick. Jesus the illegitimate. Rejected by
his own people, death by crucifixion?

If you want to leave a mark on the pages of history, what do you
need to do? Well, an obvious way is to occupy a political office of
influence. By merely occupying the office you will be remembered in
some way. History will remember you. No president of the US will be
forgotten. No emperor or Rome was forgotten. And yet somehow
Jesus is remembered far, far more than any Caesar ever was.

He never left the small little region of Galilee and Judea, these tiny little regions. Rome hardly even noticed they owned it, it was so insignificant.

Try to get your mind around this. This would be like a pastor who worked 30 years of his life in a tire factory, decided to take a pastorate in a small church in Nevada, minister there for 3 and a half years in that small town and never left, never visited the white house, and then dies....it would be like having that man's legacy eclipse the legacy of the president of the US. How?

What possible way could a man like that be remembered?

The entire setup of everything we've talked about here makes this story invisible to history books.

- Time will erase this. No questions.
- Time is merciless in washing away stuff that is average or normal.
- It's only the truly great things that time cannot erase.
- It's only the absolutely massive and impressive things that history remembers.
- Really what time remembers is POWER.

Now here's the hinge. Here's why it is remembered. The cross is the power. What we have seen today is the paradox of power in the cross. Jesus died a criminals death on the most stigmatized instrument of torture you could have imagined. And yet over and over and over again, the Bible says that the cross is the power of God. How did God turn this instrument of shame into an instrument of power? Why was the cross powerful?

Because it was evidence of the greatest love this world has ever known. Remember last week we said, "How did Jesus change the

world?" By simply being who he was. Well who is he? Jesus as God is love, and the cross is the evidence of this great love.

Romans 5:7-8, For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Do you see now why the cross has power? Because the cross is love. It says, right there in Romans, there's no greater love. I loved you so much that I would choose to die for you. This is such an important concept to the redemption story for you to understand. Jesus **CHOSE** to die for you.

Jesus' death on a cross was absolutely voluntary. In John 10, Jesus says, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

Some might say, "Well, that's nice, but there have been other voluntary deaths." Not really. You might object, "Well, there are a lot of war stories where guys risk their own life saving their friend. There are hundreds of these kinds of stories in history."

Well, listen. You realize that for all of us, we can maybe choose the

circumstances of our death, but we don't choose to die, because we're going to die. That's happening to us. It's unavoidable.

It's like a pilot that runs out of fuel. He's got a certain amount of control over where that aircraft lands, but it's going to land.

But Jesus didn't have to die at all. Death had no rights over him. He had eternal energy, divine life. Eternal life is what he deserved. Jesus Christ's death is the only truly and completely voluntary death.

Do you know what that means? That means that if he died, it was because he chose to. And why would anyone choose to die? If he had infinite power to overcome death, why didn't he just break free from the nails that hung him on the cross? How in the world could mere men, take the arms of the one who created the stars and nail them to tree Is there a nail that strong? Are their chains that strong?

When we look at all this weakness and stigma surrounding his birth, when we look at the face of the disfigured Messiah, moaning in agony, and are shattered by it, what you are looking at is love. He is doing that out of love for you!

The voluntariness of Jesus' death shows the depth of his love. Perhaps the most amazing verses of Is 53 tells us exactly the reason why Jesus allowed men to do this for him.

Isaiah 53:10-11, Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

It was the nails of the Romans but it was God who crushed him. Why? Why would he do that? There was a result he was trying to accomplish. The suffering, the crushing, produced something. Read those words slowly, "OUT OF THE ANGUISH OF HIS SOUL, HE SHALL SEE AND BE SATISFIED?"

What does he see? He sees that the sin has been forgiven and that we have been redeemed. What he's saying is, "All this suffering was worth it." Can you even conceive?

- He lost everything.
- He was crushed.
- He was marred beyond human likeness.
- He didn't even look human anymore.
- He lost his Father,
- He was the Lord of the worlds.
- He lost the universe.
- He lost his glory.
- He lost his beauty. He lost everything.

Yet he looks at you and me and says, "I lost all of this, but I got this (you and me), and it's worth it. The father was glorified in my love of his children. It was worth it."

Do you see how Jesus turned this instrument of shame into an instrument of power. It was the greatest reversal this world has ever seen. That those who intended to bury, shame and silence him by nailing him to a cross would put him on an instrument of torture that would elevate and honoring and trumpet his glorious love and grace. This is why the cross is powerful. Because in it we see the love of God. It's the brilliance of it!

Let's remember what Corinthians says.

1 Corinthians 1:18-24, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

You and I both know that love is the most powerful force in the world. Just the small amount of human love you have experienced in your life can move mountains.

This Christmas see the power of God in the weakness of the child. See the power of God in the crucified Savior. Why is it powerful? Because that voluntary weakness represents love, the greatest power that exists in the world. Love is more powerful than anything. Don't you agree. What force is greater than love. Christmas is about the love of God for needy beggars.

Listen take your eyes off yourself and revel in God's love for you. Allow it to change you. So many people look at their lives and say, "God is so distant because look at all these hard circumstances." What does Christmas teach us? Hard circumstances, also known as weakness, creates the opportunity for you to be loving and to experience God's power. Hard circumstances can be redeemed and transformed. When you are reviled, love. When you are mistreated, love. When you are persecuted for righteousness sake, love.

That is the true power. What is Christmas power? The voluntary surrendering of your rights, the decision to be weak that you might serve others in love.