

THE MESSIAH WILL WIN FOR YOU

ISAIAH 53:10-12

Boxing seems to have been a much bigger sport when I was a kid than it is now. 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. It's a funny thing about big fights – they don't always clearly resolve the issue of who's really the best fighter. Sometimes boxers fight each other several times and neither one wins all the bouts. Ali and Frazier fought three times with Ali winning two of the three bouts. Now, I don't know a great deal about boxing, but I do know that championship fights sometimes end in what's called a split decision. A boxing match has three judges. A split decision occurs when two judges determine that Boxer A won while the third judge concludes that, no, Boxer B actually won. A split decision leaves some unanswered questions about who really won the fight. Rather than being absolutely decisive, a split decision means there's no clear-cut winner.

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 that God was going to send into the world. Jesus of Nazareth fulfills everything Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be and do. Jesus Christ is one and the same as Jesus Messiah. Over the last five weeks, we've seen together that Isaiah provides an astounding, amazing prediction of Jesus' suffering on the cross and its implications hundreds of years before it happened.

I suggest that the cross was the biggest fight of all time. This was and is the heavyweight championship fight of all time and eternity. Nearly 2000 years ago, the most decisive battle was fought and won. Now, here's the irony. From one perspective, the cross looks like a total and complete defeat for the Kingdom of God. It looks like God lost by a clear knock out punch. It looks like the devil, sin and evil won hands down. But from Isaiah's perspective – and this is backed up by the entire New Testament – exactly the opposite was and is true. In v. 10-12 of chapter 53, Isaiah tells us that the cross was not a defeat for the Kingdom of God or the Messiah. It was and is the greatest victory ever won. Jesus won this fight totally, absolutely, decisively, finally and forever.

To put it another way, there was no split decision at the cross. Jesus delivered a cosmic knock out punch to the jaw of evil that was so powerful that it seemingly lifted the devil over the ropes and right out of the ring! The cross wasn't a defeat; it was a victory. The cross is not a mindless tragedy; it's an incomparable triumph. 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's a win that was, that is and that will be! It has a past, present and future dimension. And the effect of this victory – this win – goes on forever. Its impact, value and effect only get bigger as time goes along. Let's remember, first, that...

THE CROSS WAS AN IMMEDIATE TRIUMPH.

Now, how on earth could that be 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 stroke. How so? The guilt of human sin was paid for completely when Jesus breathed His last breath and died. Isaiah clearly taught that the Messiah would be our substitute. 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 to have your sins forgiven. The way was now open for you to enter into a living, eternal relationship with God Himself. The way was now open for you to begin experiencing eternal life. This was no cosmic split decision. It was an immediate, overwhelming triumph – utterly decisive and complete in all of its scope and dimensions.

Isaiah clearly says here that the death of Jesus was God's will. He says, "Still, it's what God had in mind all along, to crush him with pain..." (Isaiah 53:10 MSG) This wasn't God the Father being heartless and cruel towards His Son, Jesus. This was the only way to win the war and bring lost human beings back into a proper relationship with their Creator. Only a totally sinless substitute could open the door of reconciliation with the God of the Universe. Isaiah says, "... 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." (Isaiah 53:11 NLT). Never forget this all important truth: Jesus was not a victim at the cross. This was His chosen destiny.

Jesus had no desire to go through the spiritual and physical agony of the cross. Nevertheless, He threw Himself with His whole heart into His own suffering and death because He knew it was the only way to bring sinful human beings back to His Father. The people who saw Jesus die that awful day thought God was punishing Him. They were right about what was happening but wrong about the cause. God was indeed punishing Jesus, but not for His own sins and misdeeds. He didn't have any. He was being punished for your sin and mine. I don't think the devil ever saw it coming: this decisive knock out punch. He thought he had won some great victory against God that day. But when Jesus yielded up His spirit and died— as strange as it may sound – God's grace and mercy caught the devil flush on his jaw and knocked him out of the ring!

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 and, some time later, this friend was killed in battle. Because of a clerical error, the first young man was drafted yet again. "You can't take me," he told the enlistment officers. "I'm legally dead. I legally died on the battlefield." The officers argued with him, but he insisted that they look on the draft roll. Sure enough, there on the roll was the man's name with his deceased friend's name next to it. The issue finally went to Napoleon himself to resolve. Napoleon 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." 2000 years ago, Jesus died in order to pay the penalty for your sin. He literally died in your place. And because of Him, your name is written in heaven's book of life with Jesus' name written right beside it. No controversy. No questions. No unresolved

issues. No split decision. Done. Finished. Over. Completed. Jesus' triumph at the cross was immediate. But here's a second and equally important truth:

THE CROSS WAS AN IMMANENT TRIUMPH.

What does that mean? It means that the victory Jesus won at the cross isn't just something that has value in the past. It has incredible and ongoing significance and force right now in the present... today... this every moment. How is that true? Notice again what Isaiah says about this coming Messiah. "...Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands." (Isaiah 53:10 NLT) I believe Isaiah is pointing to or implying the resurrection. If the Messiah stays dead, then how would He be able to have descendants? And who are these descendants? Dan Brown and his book, The DaVinci Code, notwithstanding, Jesus never married and He had no physical offspring. Jesus has only spiritual descendants. Who are they? Each man, woman, boy and girl over the last 2000 years of human history who has received the gift of eternal life by putting his or her personal trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. They've been born again by the Holy Spirit and adopted into God's eternal family. And for nearly 2000 years, Jesus has been watching that family grow and grow and grow!

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 says about the Messiah, "When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied...." (Isaiah 53:11 NLT) Satisfied! Mission accomplished! Victory achieved! The cross of Jesus isn't just some old, irrelevant historical fact to look back on every now and then. It matters in your life today and every day. Because of the cross, you enjoy and experience God's grace today, God's love today, God's power today, God's joy 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." (Isaiah 53:12 NLT) The literal Hebrew there conveys a sense of continuous, on going action. When you intercede for someone, it means you intervene in a positive way. For instance, two friends have a falling out and a third friend intercedes to repair the broken relationship. He or she intervenes. Because of your sin, you offended an absolutely holy God. Jesus interceded on your behalf. The cross was an intervention. But it didn't stop at the cross. The Bible teaches that Jesus continues to intercede or intervene on your behalf today and tomorrow.

Why do you need Jesus continually interceding and intervening in your life? You continue to need forgiveness. You continue to need comfort and strength in times of heartache and struggle. You continue to need the power of the Holy Spirit at all times and especially when you sense your own weakness. At this very moment, Jesus is interceding on your 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.” (Romans 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.” (Hebrews 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 on their test, the professor told them they could bring as much information to the exam as they could fit on a piece of notebook paper. Most students crammed as many facts as possible on their 8-1/2 x 11 inch sheet of paper. But one student walked into class, put a piece of notebook paper on the floor, and had an advanced logic student stand on the paper. The advanced logic student told him everything he needed to know. He was the only student who got an “A.” The ultimate final exam will come when you stand before God and He asks, “Why should I let you in?” On your own you can’t pass that exam. All your attempts to earn eternal life fall far short. But you do have Someone who will stand in for you. His Name is Jesus.

Because of what Jesus did and does, you are being forgiven this very moment, you continue to be accepted this very moment, you are being made whole this very moment, and you are being empowered and strengthened this very moment. The cross was no split decision. It was and is total victory. Claim that victory; enjoy that victory; live in that victory; live out that victory! It was an immediate triumph. It is an immanent triumph. Here’s a final thought about this triumph to reflect upon today:

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 that something in the future can’t be stopped or avoided. How does that apply to the cross? The victory that Jesus won at the cross hasn’t been fully realized yet. There are still more wonderful results to come from this greatest of all triumphs. And these wonderful results can’t be stopped, stalled or avoided. They’re inevitable! Isaiah implies this sense of inevitability. God says about the Messiah, “Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong...” (Isaiah 53:12 NIV). The prophet depicts 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...” (Isaiah 53:12 NLT) His triumph is inevitable.

It’s clear that this total, complete triumph 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.” (Hebrews 9:28 NLT) Isaiah predicted the first coming of the Messiah some 700 years before the actual fact. Was he right about that? Did it actually happen? Certainly it happened exactly as he predicted. You can be absolutely confident, then, that Jesus will come again a second time. A future day of absolute and fully realized victory is coming.

Now, it's my personal conviction that some followers of Jesus spend far too much time and effort trying to figure out when Jesus will come again and what events will precede His coming. 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.'" (Matthew 24:36 MSG) The events preceding Jesus' second coming are open to many interpretations. I'm not saying you should be ignorant of these matters by any means. But neither should it become the focus of your life. The Bible's advice about the second coming of Jesus is quite simple, " 'You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.'" (Matthew 24:44 NLT) Don't speculate over all these various prophetic calendars. Don't try to strategize. Just be ready... everyday and at anytime ! There needs to a sense of immediacy in your attitude to Jesus' return.

I kind of like 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." "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 next hour?" "Well, yes." "Could He come back in the next few minutes?" "Yes, dear!" There was a bit of a pause before the little girl said, "Mommy, could you comb my hair?"

If Jesus returned before the end of this service, would you be ready? He's not asking you to live fearfully; instead He calls you to live faithfully each and every day. He invites you to live a committed, devoted and surrendered life to Him each and every day. The Bible's message is quite clear. One day every follower of Jesus will share in the inevitable triumph of Jesus. No split decision. This was, this is and this will be a knock out triumph – total, complete, absolute and final.

If you're like me, you've had about all the presidential campaigning you can stomach for awhile. But back in the 1960 presidential campaign, John F. Kennedy liked to close his campaign speeches with the story of a Colonel Davenport, the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives. One day, way back in 1789, the sky over Hartford, Connecticut darkened ominously. As the representatives were going about their business, they glanced out the window and became increasingly concerned about the power of a tremendous storm bearing down on them. This approaching storm looked so dangerous to them that they genuinely feared for their lives. There were some calls for an immediate adjournment so all of them could seek shelter. But Colonel Davenport got up and said, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is 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 spiritually and morally. It can look downright scary out there at times. Nevertheless, 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. And He invites you to join Him in that triumph.