

Have you ever been in anguish? Anguish is a very specific word. It's not just pain. Anguish comes from a Latin word that means a tightening; a narrowing; it means being gripped; feeling squeezed by something extremely unpleasant. A person can most certainly be in physical anguish, but mental and emotional anguish is just as real and distressing and devastating.

Over the past month we have become well acquainted with anguish. The coronavirus pandemic has gripped everyone, in one way or another, and many are dealing with personal crises that were there before we knew what COVID-19 was. Or, something has developed since the shutdowns began. You feel squeezed by an icy hand, and relief is hard to come by.

One of the most unique qualities of the Christian faith is this: we have a relationship with a God who has been in anguish. He can relate to us because he has felt the narrow tightening of physical and psychological pain. He is not above it all. Jesus came into this world and he suffered, and it was real suffering. It was authentic. He knows how it feels and He knows what you are going through. But the incredible thing about Jesus is that He is not only able to sympathize with us in our anguish, but for Him, anguish is a sensation from which something new is born. From a place of deep pain, something new and unmistakably good unfolds. This is the miracle of the cross. As it said in Isaiah 53: 11, “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.” Out of the anguish of his soul are these good things born, and to stack miracle upon miracle, these words about Jesus' anguish were written around 700 years before the actual events. 700 years.

To give you a sense of perspective, 700 years ago was 1320 A.D. It was an era of kings and kingdoms, epidemics, popes and crusades. The Reformation would not happen for another 200 years or so. What are the chances of someone from 1320 accurately predicting what life would be like today in 2020? And even more than that, what are the odds that someone could accurately predict what one particular person would think and feel as they lived their life; even describing the precise manner in which they would die in 2020? The odds would be astronomical and next to impossible. Yet that is exactly what we have in Isaiah 52 and 53: a prophetic prediction of Jesus' mission, drawn in very personal terms, capturing elements of his death and resurrection, and explaining what it means, 700 years in advance.

And the picture Isaiah paints of Jesus is a portrait of a suffering servant. It is not the portrait of a warrior who fights his way to the top. It is not the portrait of a wizard who waves a wand and magically removes everything bad. It is not the portrait of a King who metes out judgment with an iron fist. It is the portrait of a servant who suffers; who knows all about sorrow and grief; who will experience an anguish of the soul because of the exchange that he's come to make. Verse 11 tells how it works: “the righteous one...shall make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.” There's the exchange. The servant bears iniquities. He is a carrier of sins. He does this, knowing its going to crush him. He does this because once it's done; once the staggering price for sin is finally paid, he can make many to be accounted righteous. In other

words, he can credit their account with his payment. He lets his good status pass to them. It's an exchange: the servant gets our sin and its consequence; we get his perfect record slipped into our file. We are regarded as he is regarded. Do you understand? Isaiah is walking us through the spiritual benefits of Jesus' crucifixion 700 years before it happens. Jesus will allow himself to be gripped with pain and utterly squeezed, poured out upon the cross, if it means he can take hold of you and show you the meaning of grace, forgiveness, life, and love that endures.

Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah, defying astronomical odds to make each prophetic line come true. He was betrayed by his own disciple and abandoned by them all; he was slandered, mocked, and abused; like a sheep before its shearers is silent, he kept his mouth shut before the chief priest and Herod; he was physically beaten and disfigured, his appearance marred at the hands of Roman soldiers; he was nailed to a cross where he hung among the criminals, fighting for every breath, the pain excruciating. His blood flowed from each wound. And then, the greatest horror; the one who knew no sin became sin for us and meets his inevitable end. God the Father gives sin its due, and sin is now His Son. It is finished. Jesus gives up his spirit and dies, totally alone.

With Jesus, anguish is a sensation from which something new is born. From a place of deep pain, something new and unmistakably good unfolds. Isaiah anticipated it; and you can live in it. Something good begins in you when you first realize how bad your sin problem really is. You can't just shrug it off. It's so bad that it made Jesus' anguish necessary. But out of that anguish, Jesus sees and is satisfied. What does he see? He sees the fulfillment of his mission. He has carried your sins and he has buried your sins, yet you remain. You remain his to love. He credits you with his perfect performance of love. He sees and is satisfied that you are forgiven, you are purchased by his payment, you are adopted into his eternal family in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.