

April 9, 2006 by Steve Brandon



He was a Substitute

Isaiah 53:4-6

1. He died for the result of sin (verse 4).
2. He died for the healing of sin (verse 5).
3. He died for the forgiveness of sin (verse 6).

In recent days, the movie, "Narnia" has swept our country. It came out a few months ago. This week it was available for purchase on DVD. We purchased a copy and my children have been watching it many times. My son has now watched it five times. This movie is based upon the book that C. S. Lewis first published in the 1950's, entitled, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" and it has been a favorite children's story since that time. A few years ago, I remember reading this story to my oldest daughter, who enjoyed it so much, that we continued to read his entire series (of seven books) together.

The story is basically a broad allegory of the meaning of the death of Christ. The story begins by introducing us to four children, who enter into a magical world, called Narnia, through a magical wardrobe. Upon entering, they discover that the world is under the wicked spell of the White Witch. Her spell was terrible. It caused the land of Narnia always to be winter, and never Christmas.

One of these four children, Edmund, proved himself to be a traitor. Rather than giving his allegiance to Aslan, the Christ figure, he gave his allegiance to the White Witch. As a result, Edmund was rightfully the witch's property. Even when Edmund was rescued and brought into Aslan's camp, he was still the property of the witch. And so, there came to be a day in which the witch came into Aslan's camp to claim Edmund, who was rightfully hers. But Aslan, wanting to protect Edmund, made a deal with the White Witch. Aslan would die in Edmund's place. In so doing, Aslan became Edmund's substitute. That is the great picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Jesus died upon the cross at Calvary, He died in the place of others. He died in the place of sinners.

This is what the story of Narnia is all about! It's all about the sacrifice of Aslan, the Christ figure. His sacrifice was in the place of Edmund. Just as Edmund deserved to die for his treachery, so also do we all deserve to die. But, Jesus Christ took the place of those who believe on Him.

The main point of the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about substitution. All of us have sinned. As such, we all deserve to die. Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." But, the good news is that Jesus Christ, died in our place. Jesus Christ died for us! Jesus Christ died instead of us! In other words, Jesus Christ bore the punishment that our sins deserved, rather than we bearing the punishment ourselves.

This is the good news that we proclaim! That's why we gather here each Sunday morning for worship! That's why we exist as a church! That's what eternity is all about! Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners! This truth is all over the Bible! Please consider with me the following Scripture passages. (Notice all of the substitutionary words).

Mark 10:45, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom **for** many."

John 10:11 - Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life **for** the sheep."

John 10:15, "I lay down My life **for** the sheep."

Romans 5:6 - "While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died **for** the ungodly."

Romans 5:8 - "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died **for** us."

Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over **for** us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

1 Corinthians 15:3, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died **for** our sins according to the Scriptures."

2 Corinthians 5:15, "He died **for** all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again **on their behalf**."

2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin **on our behalf**, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Galatians 1:4, "[the Lord Jesus Christ] ... gave Himself **for** our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age."

Galatians 2:20, "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up **for** me."

Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse **for** us."

Ephesians 5:2, "Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up **for** us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up **for** her."

1 Thess. 5:9-10, "For God has not destined us **for** wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died **for** us."

Titus 2:14, "[Christ Jesus] gave Himself **for** us to redeem us from every lawless deed."

Hebrews 2:9, "Jesus, because of the suffering of death [was] crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He

might taste death **for** everyone."

1 Peter 2:21, "Christ also suffered **for** you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."

1 Peter. 3:18, "Christ also died **for** sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God."

1 John 3:16, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life **for** us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Why did I go through all of those verses? Because, I wanted to show you that the idea of substitution in the sacrifice of Christ is all over the pages of Scripture. The meaning of the death of Christ is clear for all to see: He died as a substitute. But, furthermore, the idea of substitution in the sacrifice of Christ is all over the verses that we will be considering this morning.

I invite you to open your Bibles to Isaiah 53. As we anticipate our Easter celebration next week, last week we began a three-week study of Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant. Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would suffer, only to be followed by great glory afterwards (1 Peter. 1:11). We saw last week how accurately this described the life of Jesus Christ. This week, we will see how theologically the death of the Messiah is explained. Next week, we will see how clearly Isaiah anticipated the resurrection of Christ.

This morning, our focus will be upon Isaiah 53:4-6. I have entitled my message this morning, "He was a Substitute." As you look through these verses, you will find the concept of substitution seven times in three verses. Consider the following verses:

Isaiah 53:4, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore.

Isaiah 53:4, "Our sorrows He carried."

Isaiah 53:5, "He was pierced through for our transgressions."

Isaiah 53:5, "He was crushed for our iniquities."

Isaiah 53:5, "The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him."

Isaiah 53:5, "By His scourging we are healed."

Isaiah 53:6, "The LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

But in Isaiah 53, there are others that have this same idea.

Isaiah 53:8, "He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due."

Isaiah 53:10, "He would render Himself as a guilt offering."

Isaiah 53:11, "He will bear their iniquities."

Isaiah 53:12, "He Himself bore the sin of many."

My aim this morning is very simple: I want for you to clearly understand that Jesus Christ died as a substitute for sinners. If you are believer in Him this morning, the great reality of the universe is that He died in your place. Throughout eternity, God will never allow us to forget this fact. When we look upon Jesus for all eternity, He will look to us as a slaughtered lamb (Rev. 5:6). Forever will this image will be before you to remind you of how Jesus died in the place of sinners. Forever this will provoke your praise to Him!

1. He died for the result of sin (verse 4).

Look at the beginning of verse 4, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore and our sorrows He carried."

This verse anticipates the great healing power of Jesus. Sin has a great effect upon our lives. Do you know why sickness is in the world? It is because of sin. Do you know why disease is in the world? It is because of sin. Do you know why grief is in the world? It is because of sin. Do you know why sorrow is in the world? It is because of sin. When Jesus Christ died upon the cross, He was dying to remove these effects.

Jesus dealt with these thing during His time of stay upon the earth. Consider with me the healing ministry of Jesus. When Jesus came to the people of Israel, He had great compassion upon those who were sick and diseased and grieving. On many occasions, large crowds of people came to Jesus, "bringing with them those who were lame, crippled blind and mute, ... [laying] them down at His feet" and waiting for Him to heal them (Matt. 15:31).

What impresses every reader of the New Testament is that all who came to Jesus were healed of their sicknesses. He healed lepers of their skin disease (Matt. 8:1-4). He reduced the fevers of the sick (Matt. 8:14). He cast out the demons from the crazed (Matt. 8:28-34). He gave strength to the legs of the paralytics (Matt. 9:1-8). He open the eyes of the blind (Matt. 20:29-34). He restored withered hands (Matt. 12:9-14).

So extensive was His healing ministry in those days that Matthew writes of how Jesus "was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people" (a literal translation of Matt. 4:23). There were times in which the healing ministry of Jesus was so busy with all of the crowds coming to him that Jesus and His disciples didn't even have time to eat! (Mark 3:20; 6:30).

This is what Isaiah 53:4 is talking about. "Surely, our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried." When Jesus walked upon the earth, He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. These words were anticipating the healing ministry of Jesus. In Matthew 8:17, the gospel writer tells us that the healing ministry of Jesus had a purpose. It was "to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 'He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases'" (Matt. 8:17).

This word translated, "grief" has the idea of weakness or sickness or disease. The word translated, "sorrows" speaks a bit more generically about the "distresses" of life. If there is any difference between these words, it's a difference between the physical and the spiritual. Whereas the first word, "griefs" has a nuance more upon the physical pains of this life: the sicknesses, the illnesses, and the diseases. This word,

"sorrow" focuses more upon the general pain cause by sin. He's talking about all of the effects that sin produces, or (as I have stated it), "He died for the result of sin."

I trust that you realize that when the devastation of sin is felt, it goes far beyond sickness and illness, which is merely felt in the body. There is often great pain that is felt in the spirit of a man, and causes untold anguish of soul. Often, such pain will far exceed the pains of sickness and disease. For instance, think of the David. He spoke of the sorrow caused by his own, unconfessed sin. When David kept silent about his sin, he said that he would groan all day long (Ps. 32:3). He said that his vitality was drained away from him as with the fever heat of summer (Ps. 32:4).

But the effect of sin in your inner man doesn't merely come from your own sin. It can come from others as well. People can cause great sorrow in your heart without ever touching you. A word spoken in anger can penetrate deep into your soul and cause much hurt and bitterness. Fathers can devastate their children, by never allowing them to be good enough to be accepted in their sight. Husbands can destroy their wives by speaking down upon them with regularity. Wives can discourage their husbands through repeated nagging.

Words produced by our tongue can light a fire among people that can cause deep wounds. Proverbs 16:28 says that "a slanderer separates intimate friends." Imagine with me some close friends. Along comes a slanderer and speaks to one of these friends a lie about the other one. Though the lie is utterly untrue, a rift develops between close friends. And soon, these friends are separated, never to commune closely again, ... all because of a lie. And the sorrow that is caused by such broken relationships is great.

Such are some of the sorrows of life. You can add to these the sorrows of the tragedies that take place all around us. A terrorist attack that kills the life of a friend. A hurricane that takes the life of a family member. A debilitating illness that comes upon a spouse. A broken marriage that destroys a sense of meaning in this life.

Enough of the bad news. Let's look at the good news. Jesus Christ bore our griefs and carried our sorrows (verse 4). His work on the cross will take our sorrows away. The idea here isn't so much that Jesus took our griefs and sorrows upon Himself, so that He was filled, Himself, with grief. (That was the idea in verse 3, where we read that He was a man of sorrows and was acquainted with grief). But, the idea here is that Jesus took our griefs and our sorrows upon His own back, and then, He walked away with them, never to allow them to be seen again. That's what it means that Jesus "bore" them. It means that He took them away, by carrying them along, away from our presence.

His earthly ministry was only a taste of what He will ultimately do. There is a day in which all of our griefs and all of our sorrows will be fully wiped away. When God comes back to establish His eternal kingdom, God "will wipe away every tear from our eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain" (Rev. 21:4). Can you even imagine this? Our griefs ... turned into joy! Our sorrows ... gone! Our broken relationships ... mended! Our depression ... never to return! Our guilt ... wiped clean. Can you imagine it?

Notice that there is a degree of certainty in these words. Isaiah said, "Surely." "Surely He bore our griefs" as if to assure us that these things would take place. As surely as we are gathered here this morning, Jesus Christ will remove all griefs and sorrows from our lives. When Jesus died upon the cross, not only did Jesus bear our sins in His body on the tree, but He also bore all the results of sin. "He bore our griefs" and "our sorrows He carried."

He did this all, even when we misjudged him. We read at the end of verse 4, "Yet, we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." How easy is it for us to misjudge people. I was reminded this past week of how I misjudged a member of our congregation. It's been about four years now that we have been renting Rockford Christian High School. Four years ago, as we were planning and preparing to setup this facility for worship each Sunday, Doug Sosnowski volunteered to head up the effort. I was very pleased that he had volunteered, because had he not, I would have been the one setting it up.

Well, shortly before we began worshiping here, I told Doug how setting up the church will be easy for the first few months, as the excitement will encourage us on. But, I warned him that after a year or so, it would get tough. (I knew this from personal experience. When we planted Kishwaukee Bible Church in DeKalb, we rented an auditorium for a bit over a year. I was in charge of setting up on Sunday mornings. After about a year of taking things in and out of our van, I had had enough. Such probably speaks to my motives in the service at the time).

Anyhow, from first-hand experience, I knew that it would get tough for him after about a year. And thus, I encouraged him to distribute the load, so as to ease his burden. Doug insisted to me that such would not be the case. He said that if you serve with the right heart, such work should never become a burden. I wasn't going to argue with him. I was simply going to let him see the wisdom of my ways in a year or so.

Well, here we are four years later, and Doug has been a one-man setup crew. He has served our church faithfully for years, never uttering even a single word of complaint. Frankly, I have been astonished. I have been amazed. I have been encouraged. Doug has shown himself to be a true servant of the church.

I love speaking well of Doug to others about him. When people find out that we don't have a building, but rent a facility, one of the first questions that they ask is about setup. "Oh, do you have a setup crew?" I delight to tell them that there is one guy in our church who is extraordinary. "He makes the church run," I tell them. "Though we don't have a building, it is always set up and ready to go. After church, the tear down goes flawlessly as well. To me, as a pastor of a church, Doug makes it seem as if we have a church building. I'm not burdened by the setup of the facility at all."

This past week, I wanted to honor Doug and express my gratefulness to him for his service to this body. And so, my wife and I invited his entire family over for dinner and a small party with our two families. I called it the "Steve was wrong" party. I want to make it a yearly celebration of the faithful service that Doug has rendered to this body of believers.

Well, I may have judged Doug incorrectly. But many in Jesus' day misjudged Jesus as well. "Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." This phrase is merely a repetition of the truth found in verse 3. "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man

of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."

When the people of Jesus' day thought about Jesus, they thought him to be a wayward prophet. Oh, certainly He displayed some wondrous powers. But, where did it land Him? It landed Him upon the cross. Perhaps you remember the crowds who saw Jesus hanging upon the cross. They said to Him as He was dying, ...

... "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself!"
... "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."
... "He saved others; He cannot save Himself."
... "He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him."
... "He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matt. 27:40-43).

Such abuse came from those who were merely passing by on the road (Matt. 27:39). Such abuse came from the chief priests (Matt. 27:41). Such abuse even came from the robbers who were crucified with Him (verse 44). When Jesus was upon the cross, nobody gave Him any respect at all. In fact, should you think for a moment about their accusations, you would quickly understand that they were mocking Jesus as a false prophet, who rightly deserved His death. Indeed, the people of Jesus' day esteemed Jesus to be "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (verse 4). But, such mocking was the path to dealing with the result of sin.

Just as I have come to acknowledge my misjudgment of Doug, our setup chief, so also do you need to acknowledge any misjudgment of Jesus that you might have. Perhaps you see Him as a misguided holy man, who deserved to die as a criminal, stricken and smitten by God. Perhaps you seen in Him something that you don't like. For you to experience the joys of having your griefs removed from you and your sorrows carried away, you need to acknowledge any way in which you have misjudged Jesus. You need to realize that His death upon the cross came because he was a substitute for sin. Particularly, (1) He died for the result of sin (verse 4). But, also, ...

2. He died for the healing of sin (verse 5).

Verse 5 says this: "But He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him. And by His scourging we are healed."

These verses well describe the agony of the cross in bitter detail. When Jesus was placed upon the cross, He was secured by long, Roman spikes that were driven into His hands and His feet. During the hours of His torture, He was suspended by these nails. Shortly after Jesus died, the Roman soldiers came to Him and "pierced His side with a spear" which produced a flood of blood and water that came out of His side (John 19:34). Hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented, Isaiah wrote that He would be "**pierced** through" (Is. 53:5).

Before Jesus was placed upon the cross, He was taken away by some Roman soldiers, who made sport with Him. The Bible tells us that these "soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head" (John 19:2). They put a purple robe upon Him and mocked Him as a pretend king (John 19:2-3). They also **scourged** Him (John 19:1). A Roman scourge consisted of long stick with two or three thongs attached to it. Each of these thongs were made of a rope-like material, in which pieces of bone or metal were woven. The soldiers would use these scourges to beat Jesus. Each time they struck Him with these scourges, the bone and metal would strike his back, causing great pain. Upon pulling the scourge back, the bone and metal would often rip the skin, exposing His inner back to the air as an open wound, which would again be scourged.

I believe that such punishment could easily be described using Isaiah's words. He said that Jesus would **crushed**. To be sure, none of His bones were broken. But, certainly the harsh treatment that Jesus received was a crushing, mortal blow to His body, as He eventually died from these wounds. Isaiah also said that the Messiah would be **chastened**. That is, He would be disciplined. Roman citizens were often flogged for punishment of crimes that they had done. So, as Jesus was scourged, this was surely a form of punishment that fell upon Him.

And so, we see the accurate description of the things that happened to Jesus, when He was crucified. But, look at how Isaiah interpreted these events. See, it's not just important that the Messiah would be brutally murdered. But rather, these events have a specific meaning. They have specific purpose. And the purpose is substitution. "He was pierced through **for** our transgressions. He was crushed **for** our iniquities; The chastening **for** our well-being fell upon Him. And **by** His scourging we are healed."

In the first two phrases, the suffering of Jesus was "for" the bad things that we have done. In the last two phrases, the suffering of Jesus was "for" good things for us. In other words, the wrong that we have done has caused Jesus to suffer. And the suffering that came upon Jesus was ultimately for our good. The wrong that we had done is described in verse 5 as our "transgressions" and "our iniquities." The good that we receive is our "well-being" (or peace) and our "healing." There is this swap that took place. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says it about as good as any text in the Bible. "God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." He took the bad. He gave the good. In this verse we see the double substitution. Jesus received the punishment that our sin deserved. We receive the righteousness that only Jesus deserved.

It's a bit like the story, "The Prince and the Pauper." It's the story of prince, who enjoys the pleasures of nobility, and a pauper, who lives through all of the difficulties of poverty. At one point, they encounter each other and realize that they look so much alike that they would be able to trade places. And so they do. Everything that the Prince had, the Pauper comes to enjoy. And everything that caused the Pauper to suffer, the Prince had to endure. This is the type of double substitution that took place in the cross. We receive the good of Jesus, while He took upon Himself all of our bad.

When you think about this for any length of time, you are immediately impressed with how unfair this is. Our transgression and our iniquities deserve a bad result for us. But, because of the work of Christ on the cross, we receive peace and healing. The perfect life of Jesus deserved good results for Him. But, He received torture instead. Our sinful lives deserved punishment. But, we receive blessing instead. And you have

to ask, "Why?" "Why would God do such a thing?" There is only one reason: God's grace. His grace comes to us only because of His love and kindness toward us.

This is illustrated very nicely in a Charles Dickens novel entitled, "A Tale of Two Cities." The story was about London and Paris in the late 1700's. Two men come to play an important role in this story: Their names were Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton. These men were as different as different could be. Charles Darnay was a well-known and well respected teacher. He was a man of dignity and held a high standing among the all the people. Sydney Carton, on the other hand, was neither well-known, nor respected. Though he was bright, he was a drunkard, who wasted his life in slothful living.

However, these men had two things in common. First of all, they bore a striking physical resemblance to one another. They could almost be confused as twins. Secondly, they both were in love with the same woman, Lucie Manette.

Sydney Carton knew that he had no opportunity to win the love of Lucie on account of his own sinful living and poor reputation. But one day, He had an opportunity to speak with Lucie alone. On that day, he told her that he was unworthy of her love for him, but that his own love for her was great. He said that we would willingly lay down his life for her. With that, Sydney Carton leaves the story.

As the story unfolds, Lucie Manette and Charles Darnay united in holy matrimony. As political tensions between France and England grew, Charles traveled to Paris to help some friends. Unfortunately for him, Charles was captured and thrown into prison, accused of espionage. After a trial, Charles was thrown into prison, where he awaited death by guillotine at three o'clock the next day.

Sydney Carton happened to be in France at this time and discovered what was about to take place. He came up with a plan to secure the release of Charles (and to show his love for Lucie). First of all, he sent a note to a friend of Lucie, Mr. Lorry, saying, ...

"Have a coach ready to leave Paris at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Tell Lucie of the danger they are in and that for the sake of her child and her father, she must go with you. Tell her this was her husband's final wish. Be in the coach with them all and keep a place for me. As soon as I arrive, pull me inside and drive away. Just be sure you have all the papers with you so that we can all leave for England. And no matter what happens, you must not change your plans!"

Then, shortly after two o'clock, Sydney Carton came to visit Charles Darnay in prison. He said, ...

"I come with a request from Lucie. There is no time to explain. Just take off your jacket and tie and boots, and put on mine. And give me the ribbon from your hair and shake it loose like mine."

Initially Darnay refused the plan. But Sydney Carton was insistent. And so, they exchanged clothes. At Sydney Carton's request, he had Charles write a note that simply said, ...

"If you remember the words that passed between us long ago, you will understand what I am doing. ... I am thankful to get the chance to prove those words I said to you so long ago--that I would lay down my life for you. I do it now eagerly, and you are to have no grief, no regret."

At that point, Sydney Carton drugged Charles Darnay with a cloth soaked in ether, so that he lay unconscious on the ground. Sydney Carton then stuffed the paper inside Darnay's coat and called for the guard. He said, "Guard, take my visitor out; he has become ill." Then, he told the guard to carry him to Mr. Lorry, who is waiting for him with his coach." Shortly thereafter, the clock struck three o'clock. The guards entered the prison tower and took Sydney Carton away to be executed as Charles Darnay. Darnay, still unconscious, was brought to Mr. Lorry's carriage, where he was taken safely out of Paris on route back to England.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Out of his great love for Lucie, Sydney Carton laid down his life for Charles Darnay. He was a substitute.

At some point, Charles Darnay would discover this cryptic note in his pocket. As it wouldn't make entire sense to him, he would certainly share it with Lucie, who would understand. This is what Jesus did upon the cross. He laid down His life for the well-being of those He loved. Do you understand these things? Ephesians 2:4-5 tell us that "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

3. He died for the forgiveness of sin (verse 6).

Verse 6 reads, "All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." This verse summarizes my message this morning as well as any verse in the entire Bible. We see the bad news in the first two phrases. We see the good news in the last two phrases.

The bad news is that we are like straying animals. We have gone astray from the glory of God. We have not sought for God and His righteousness. We have chosen our own way instead.

When sheep wander off and follow their own ways, they are in danger ...

... of being caught in steep-walled canyons,

... of being stranded on high cliffs,
... of having no meadow in which to eat,
... of lacking the water they need to survive,
... of being exposed to the hot sun or the freezing rain,
... of being dinner for predators like coyotes, bears, wolves, or cougars. [\[1\]](#)

When sheep wander off, they don't wander off into good paths. Rather, they often wander into paths of doom. The parallel of sheep comes directly over to us. When we choose our own path, it is often a path of doom. The Proverbs tell us, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25).

This is the path that we walk down, if we aren't guided. "A child left to his own way bring shame to his mother" (Prov. 29:15), because he travels a bad path. It's the path that all of us have traveled. We have all traveled the path that has gone away from God. Left to our own way, we will choose the wrong path.

I was working with my daughter yesterday, talking with her about probabilities. I was talking with her about the probability that a flipped coin will be "heads." The probability is one half. Half of the time the coin will be "heads" and half of the time the coin will be "tails." We talked about the probability that a baby born will be a boy or a girl. Again, the probability is about half. We talked about a dice that you can roll. One sixth of the time, it will be a "one." One sixth of the time, it will be a "two." One sixth of the time, it will be a "three." It's pretty simple and straightforward. But, should I have asked her about the probability we will walk the right path in this life, the probability wouldn't be too high. In fact, apart from the help of God, the probability would be zero.

Verse 6 gives the odds. "All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way." This is a bit similar to Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." There are none of us who have walked the right path. There are none of us who have fully reached the glory of God. We are like sheep on a cliff that need to be rescued.

In the physical realm, we understand what the shepherd must do. He must go and find the lost sheep. Once he found the sheep, he needs to bring the sheep safely to the good pastures, where there are no cliffs to fall down, where there is plenty of grass to eat, where there is plenty of water to drink, where there is ample protection from the hot sun or from the freezing rain, and where predators can't come in unawares.

In the spiritual realm, it's much the same. The shepherd needs to go and find the lost sheep. Once he found the sheep, he needs to bring the sheep safely into the safe paths of God. Psalm 23 gives the picture of the great shepherd. Perhaps these words are familiar to you, ...

Psalm 23:1-3

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the path of righteousness for His name's sake.

I'm not sure whether you heard what is different about the process of the spiritual shepherd of our souls. Did you? Before He guides you in the path of righteousness, He needs first to restore your soul. Listen closely again to verse 3, "He restores my soul; He guides me in the path of righteousness for His name's sake." This is what Isaiah 53:6 is talking about. In bringing us back on the right path, the LORD needs first to restore our souls. As we sin against a holy God, we have broken His law. We come back into His fold as a law-breaker. (Certainly, this is true of sheep as well, but sheep don't know any better). We need to deal with the laws we have broken.

The way to deal with such things isn't to make up for it with good deeds. We don't make up for it by walking on the right path. None of that will suffice. Rather, we need an atonement for our sin. "According to the law, one may almost say that all things are cleansed by blood, and without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22).

This is where the last phrase in verse 6 comes in. "The LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (verse 6). Again, this idea of substitution comes screaming out at us again. The iniquity that should rightly fall upon us lands on someone else. Our iniquity falls on Him! We simply need to believe this message. If you believe this morning and trust in Christ, your iniquity had landed upon Him on the cross. Peter put it this way, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet. 2:24).

This is the gospel. This is our hope! That Jesus Christ became our substitute, and thereby, He has established a way in which our sins may be forgiven.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 9, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] These observations come from page 88 of an excellent book written by Philip Keller, entitled, "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23."