

Christ, Our Sacrifice



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 53:2–12, Heb. 2:9, Heb. 9:26–28, Heb. 9:12, Exod. 12:5, Heb. 4:15.*

Memory Text: “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (*1 Peter 2:24, NASB*).

Catholic priest Maximilian Kolbe was imprisoned in Auschwitz for providing shelter to refugees from Greater Poland, including 2,000 Jews. When a prisoner in his barracks vanished (perhaps he escaped), the SS picked ten prisoners to be starved to death in reprisal. One of the selected men cried out, “Oh, my poor wife, my poor children. I shall never see them again.” At that point Kolbe offered himself in the man’s place; that is, he asked that he be the one to starve, not the distraught family man. The surprised SS officer agreed, and Kolbe joined the ranks of the doomed while the other man survived.

However moving, Kolbe’s sacrifice is only a shadow of the One who willingly took our place, an act symbolized in the sanctuary service. The New Testament identifies Jesus with the two major aspects of the Old Testament sacrificial system: He is our Sacrifice (*Hebrews 9, 10*), and He is our High Priest (*Hebrews 5–10*).

This week we will study different aspects of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice and see what His once-and-for-all death has provided for us.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 16.*

Jesus in Isaiah 53

Read Isaiah 53:2–12. What do these verses teach about what Christ did for us?

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is a powerful description of Christ’s death for the sins of the world. Several aspects in this passage provide clear evidence that Jesus’ death is atonement in the form of penal substitution, which means that He took the penalty that others deserved and, in fact, died as a Substitute for them. Here are some of the implications of this passage for Jesus’ ministry for us:

1. Jesus suffered *for* others. He took their grief and sorrows (*vs. 4*), transgressions, iniquities (*vss. 5, 6, 8, 11*), and sin (*vs. 12*).
2. He brings great benefits to those for whom He suffers: peace and healing (*vs. 5*) and justification (*vs. 11*).
3. It was God’s will for Jesus to suffer and be crushed (*vs. 10*). God put our iniquity on Him (*vs. 6*) because it was God’s plan that He died in our stead.
4. Jesus is righteous (*vs. 11*), without violence or deceit (*vs. 9*).
5. He was a guilt offering, an atoning sacrifice for sin (*vs. 10*).

Read Luke 22:37, Acts 8:32–35, and 1 Peter 2:21–25. How do these New Testament authors interpret Isaiah 53?

The New Testament allusions to Isaiah 53 establish beyond doubt that Jesus Christ fulfills this prophecy. Even He identified Himself with the person depicted there (*Luke 22:37*). Christ took our sins upon Himself so that we could be forgiven and transformed.

Dwell on all that Isaiah 53 says that Christ did for us. How can you make this personal, and know that no matter what you have done, the assurances here can apply to you if you give yourself to the Lord in faith and surrender?

Sufficient Substitution

Read Hebrews 2:9. What does it mean that Jesus “taste[d] death for everyone”? See also Heb. 2:17, 9:26–28, 10:12.

Jesus died for sinners. He was without sin (*Heb. 4:15*) so that when He gave His life as a sacrifice He would not die for His own sin. On the contrary, He was “to bear the sins of many” (*Heb. 9:28, NKJV*), to “make propitiation for the sins of the people” (*Heb. 2:17, NKJV*), and to put away sin forever (*Heb. 9:26*).

According to Hebrews 2:9, the purpose of making Jesus “lower than the angels” is so that He could suffer death. The point is to explain why Jesus’ death is an indispensable requirement for His exaltation. In simple terms, in order for humanity to be saved, Jesus had to die. There was no other way.

In this passage, the goal of the Incarnation is the death of the Son. Only through the suffering of death could Jesus become the Author of salvation (*Heb. 2:10*).

Why was it fitting for God to let Jesus suffer? The context in Hebrews 2:14–18 suggests that Jesus’ death was necessary in order to rescue God’s children from the slavery of death, from the devil, from the fear of death, and to qualify Jesus to become a “merciful and faithful High Priest” (*NKJV*).

In short, the Cross had to precede the crown.

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

Christ, the Creator of the universe, died as a human being for your sins. Dwell on what this means. Think of the incredible good news that it is. Think of the hope it offers you personally. How can you make this amazing truth the chief motivation of all that you do?

Christ's Blood

The concept of redemptive blood pervades the entire Bible. Starting from the earliest sacrifices after Adam and Eve sinned, blood was always present when animal sacrifices occurred. Blood rituals characterized the Israelite sacrificial system in order to illustrate the crucial truth that, without blood, we would not have any chance to be forgiven our sins and to enter into the presence of God. Blood was the only way to receive God's mercy and to have community with Him.

Read the following passages in Hebrews about Christ's blood and the blood of the Old Testament sacrifices. What do they teach us about the blood?

Heb. 9:12 _____

Heb. 9:14 _____

Heb. 9:18 _____

Heb. 9:22 _____

Heb. 10:19 _____

Heb. 12:24 _____

Heb. 13:12 _____

Heb. 13:20 _____

Christ's blood does not refer to His life, but instead it is a symbol of His substitutionary death. As such, it describes the functional aspect of that death. Christ's shed blood is amazingly multifunctional. Christ's blood obtains eternal redemption for us, provides us with cleansing from sin, provides us with forgiveness and sanctification, and is the reason for the resurrection.

In Hebrews, there is a powerful contrast: Christ's blood is better than any other blood. In fact, no other blood can really provide forgiveness; Christ's death is the only reason sins are forgiven, before and after the Cross (*Heb. 9:15*). The shedding of Christ's blood, and its effects, are clear evidence that Christ's death was substitutionary, which means that He took the penalty that we deserve.

How should an understanding of Christ's death help to free us from any notion that our own works can save us?

Spotless Sacrifice

Which criteria does a sacrificial animal need to meet? *Read Exod. 12:5, Lev. 3:1, 4:3.*

The selection of a sacrificial animal required great care. A person could not just take any animal for an offering; the animal needed to fulfill several criteria, depending on the kind of offering.

However, there is one criterion that all offerings had to meet. They had to be “unblemished.” The Hebrew word *tamim* could also be translated as “complete,” “unscathed,” “without fault,” or “perfect.” It expresses the idea that something meets the highest standard possible. Only the best was good enough.

Pertaining to people, the word is used to characterize their relationship with God as being “blameless” (*Gen. 6:9, 17:1, NASB*).

How do these texts describe Jesus? *Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 9:14; and 1 Pet. 1:18, 19. Why was it crucial that Jesus be sinless?*

Jesus, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (*John 1:29, NKJV*), perfectly fulfills the Old Testament criterion of a spotless sacrifice. His pure life established Jesus as a perfect sacrifice. This is the guarantee of our salvation, for only a sinless one could bear our sin for us, and it is His perfect righteousness that covers us, now and in the judgment. That righteousness is our hope of salvation.

Like its Hebrew equivalent, the Greek word for “without blemish” (*amomos*) is used to describe not only Jesus and His flawless sacrifice but also the character of His followers.

“By comparing their lives with Christ’s character, they will be able to discern where they have failed to meet the requirements of God’s holy law; and will seek to make themselves perfect in their sphere even as God is perfect in his sphere.”—Ellen G. White, *The Paulson Letters*, p. 374.

Through Christ’s death and His ministry, we are presented blameless before God (*Jude 24*). This is possible only because the Blameless One stands in our place.

Why can the concept of being “holy and blameless” cause uneasiness? How can the knowledge that Christ is our Substitute help you to accept that you are “holy,” as well? How should our new status before God impact the way in which we live?

A Great Danger

In the book of Hebrews, Paul not only focuses on the theological understanding of Christ's sacrifice, but he also explains some of its practical implications. At several places he shows what happens if someone ignores this sacrifice.

Read Hebrews 6:4–6 and 10:26–31. About what is Paul warning us? What kinds of attitudes does he describe?

In the book of Hebrews, Paul demonstrates how magnificent God's salvation is, how God has revealed Himself, and what He has done and is doing for the believers. However, there is at least one main, problematic issue that Paul has to address. It is the danger that Christ's sacrifice could gradually be taken for granted. He describes such a danger as "drifting away" from the goal (*Heb. 2:1*). The imagery behind Paul's words is that of a ship that is veering off course and does not reach the port of destination. So, the main task is to stay on course.

Some of those who reject God do so deliberately, which means that their lives after receiving the gospel are virtually the same as they were before these people received the gospel. These people do not, in fact, have any efficacious sacrifice for their sins (*Heb. 10:26–31*). It seems that not many believers would forthrightly reject Christ's sacrifice or even think about such a thing. Still, Paul sounds a warning. The real danger of disregard and neglect is that it is often a subtle and very gradual process. The transition can be unnoticeable. Gradually, the work of Christ is not appreciated enough, similar to Esau's failure to appreciate his birthright anymore (*Heb. 12:15–17*). Christ's sacrifice should never become so familiar that we regard it as commonplace.

Paul does not want to make his readers fearful; nevertheless, he needs to show them the consequences of veering away from God. He does not want such a thing to happen. On the positive side, he encourages them vividly to "hold fast" to all the good things of salvation (*Heb. 3:6, 14; 10:23*) and to fix their eyes on Jesus (*Heb. 12:2*).

What about you? Have you simply become "used to" the amazing truth about the Cross? Why is this such a terrible thing to do? How can we protect ourselves from the danger that Paul warns about here?

Further Study: “The Atonement, Part I—Atoning Sacrifice,” pp. 457–476, in Appendix C of *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A.

What Martin Luther frequently called a “wonderful exchange” or “joyous exchange” of Christ’s righteousness for human sin, Ellen G. White describes in a classic statement as follows: “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

“Nothing less than the death of Christ could make His love efficacious for us. It is only because of His death that we can look with joy to His second coming. His sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Some don’t like the idea of Jesus as our Sacrifice. They think it makes God sound bloodthirsty or vengeful, like the pagan deities of the past. (In fact, some argue that the language of blood and sacrifice and so forth in the Bible is simply a reflection of these pagan concepts.) What is so dramatically wrong with this perception of the Cross? How do the concepts of death, sacrifice, and blood help to show us just how serious sin and its consequences are? How should this realization of the cost of sin help us to seek God’s power to put sin out of our lives?
- ❷ Some people struggle with the issue of works and how they relate to salvation. How can keeping before us Christ’s substitutionary death, and what He accomplished for us by that death, help to protect us from falling into the trap of salvation by works? After all, what could our works possibly add to what Christ has done for us by dying in our stead?
- ❸ Ellen G. White said it would be good to spend a thoughtful hour every day focusing on the life of Jesus, especially the closing scenes. How could such an exercise help to strengthen our relationship with Christ, as well as increase our appreciation of what He has done for us?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 2:24 and Isaiah 53:5, 6*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize God’s self-sacrifice on our behalf and His unconditional and unselfish love toward people.

Feel: Foster the feeling of gratitude toward God for loving and sacrificing in order to give us the assurance of salvation.

Do: Submit to God’s plan of salvation, praise Him for His unreserved acceptance, and thoughtfully serve as He serves us.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God’s Incomprehensible Sacrifice for Sinners

A Why did Jesus have to take on human nature and die on the cross in order to save humanity? Compare with Isaiah 53.

B Why is it not possible for God simply to forgive our sins in order to solve the problem of sin?

II. Feel: God’s Self-Sacrificing Love Warms Human Hearts

A How can you express your thankfulness to God for His love and condescension to our human level?

B How does it make you feel to know that Jesus became an atoning sacrifice for you, took upon Himself a condemnation that you rightly deserve, and gave you eternal life?

III. Do: God’s Grace Restores and Changes Sinners

A Why is it so important to proclaim to the world God’s forgiveness?

B How do God’s gracious actions toward sinners help you to act toward those who err?

C Why is it so tragic if a person rejects the death of Christ?

► **Summary:** When we accept God’s love and sacrifice for us, God forgives our sins, changes our status, blesses us, and leads us into a new path of life.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Isaiah 53:4–6*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: In a powerful way, the prophet Isaiah presents the mission of the Messiah, who is called the Servant of the Lord. This is the best description of the role of our Savior. This Servant brings hope, and His death saves humanity from their sins.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson should help the members of your class understand the meaning of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ as predicted in the life of the Servant of the Lord of Isaiah 53 and as seen in the larger biblical context. This Servant of the Lord was “a man of sorrows,” “a guilt offering,” and out of love He voluntarily died for our sins.

Opening Discussion: If you were asked to describe in one chapter the most important aspects of the mission of the Messiah, what would you write about Him? What crucial points should not be omitted?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: In the second part of the book of Isaiah are five songs of the Servant of the Lord that are also called the songs of the Suffering Servant (*Isa. 42:1–9, 49:1–7, 50:4–9, 52:13–53:12, and 61:1–3*). God wants to save His people even though they do not recognize His love. He, therefore, wants us to understand and appreciate His great sacrifice for humanity. In Isaiah 53, this sacrifice can be best described as a substitutionary death that has brought victory over sin, as well as death and justification for those who accept His solution for their sinful situation.

Bible Commentary

Our eternal life depends on the fulfillment of the mission of the Servant of the Lord. His gracious sacrifice and suffering for us is the source of our justification and salvation. Understanding these passages is so vital for our spiritual life that we will explore them this week with a special emphasis on the fourth song. Follow the main thoughts of the biblical material and engage your class in the Bible study summarized in the following sections.

I. The First and Second Songs of the Servant of the Lord (*Review Isaiah 42:1–9 and 49:1–7 with your class.*)

Consider carefully Isaiah’s texts, which describe Christ’s universal mission. The first song does not reveal the identity of the Servant of the Lord but pictures His gigantic task: He will bring justice and law to the whole world and will be a covenant and a light to the world. Even though He is a King, He will not act as a conqueror, but His manner will be gentle and humble. His strength and power will be in the Word and the Spirit of God.

The second song identifies the Servant as Someone who has to fulfill a crucial role in bringing Israel and her remnant back to God (so the Servant cannot be Israel or the remnant of Israel; *see Isa. 49:6*). He is not only an Agent communicating about salvation, but He is, in His person, the Salvation to the entire world. For the first time in this song, one also finds allusion to the mental suffering and glorification of the Servant (*Isa. 49:7*).

Discussion Question: The literal translation of Isaiah 49:6 highlights the fact that the Servant of the Lord is the Salvation for the world. Compare with your class different translations of this verse and discuss with the members the difference between the declaration that Jesus Christ is the Salvation for the whole world and the statement that the Servant will bring or proclaim God’s salvation to the entire world.

II. The Third Song (*Review Isaiah 50:4–9 with your class.*)

This song is called the “Servant’s Gethsemane,” because the Servant Himself speaks about His own experience, intense suffering, and trust in the Lord. The prophet Isaiah first paints an incredibly beautiful picture of the Servant’s appointments and close relationship with God. The Lord awakens Him morning by morning in order to reveal His task for the day. The Servant’s obedient discipleship is described in this passage.

For the first time the physical suffering of this Servant is mentioned. He will be flogged, beaten, tortured, and greatly humiliated by mocking and spitting (*vs. 6*). However, in His anguish He trusts that the Lord will help Him.

Discussion Question: What from this passage of the book of Isaiah proves that the Servant of the Lord suffered voluntarily? What does it mean in Isaiah 50:7 that the Messiah set His “face like a flint” (*NKJV*)?

Activity: Ask members of your class to open their Bibles and share other verses that are dear to them about God’s love and His promises of care during our distressing times.

III. The Fourth and Fifth Songs (Review Isaiah 52:13–53:12 and 61:1–3 with your class.)

The prophet Isaiah comes to the core of the matter in his fourth song. In five stanzas, each consisting of three verses, we encounter the most sublime passage about the Servant's sacrificial life. This splendid masterpiece contains the most glorious message about the mission and accomplishments of the Messiah and describes them in the following scenario:

1. *Paradox of the Servant's life—highly exalted and deeply humiliated (Isa. 52:13–15).* The puzzle of His life seems unsolvable. But as Isaiah progresses further in this poem, the enigma becomes clearer: the Servant's journey will be through suffering and sacrificial death to glorification.

2. *Rejection of the Servant, Man of Sorrows (Isa. 53:1–3).* People do not believe in Him, and twice in this passage it is underscored that He is despised. This realistic description ends with a sad statement that no one respects Him.

3. *Atonement of the Servant of the Lord who took upon Himself our transgressions (Isa. 53:4–6).* This core of the song explains why the Servant has to go through all the suffering and humiliation: Note the passive voice of verbs in verse 5, which explains what was done for us by the Servant. Because of the Servant's voluntary and substitutionary death for us, we are healed (salvation is healing), and we may live.

4. *Suffering, trial, death, and burial of the Servant of the Lord (Isa. 53:7–9).* Isaiah now describes the Servant's complete submission to the will of God and that His grief, sorrow, and suffering were not His own but were because of "the transgression of my people."

5. *Glorification of the Servant of the Lord (Isa. 53:10–12).* This song climaxes with an explanation of the many wonderful results of the Servant's sacrificial death: resurrection, justification of many, and the sharing of His victory and spoil with others. He continues His work for sinners for whom He suffered death: He intercedes for them.

The fifth and final song (*Isa. 61:1–3*) declares that the Servant is anointed by the Lord and enabled by the Spirit to proclaim good news and apply all He has accomplished in His life and death to sinners in order to bring freedom and victory to them so that they can serve others and be His faithful servants (*Isa. 61:4–6*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why can the first reading of Isaiah 53 about the Servant of the Lord be confusing? See the story of the Ethiopian high official in Acts 8:26–40.
- 2 Why did God lead Isaiah to explain in such detail the events related to the death of the Servant of the Lord? How does Isaiah interpret the meaning of the Servant's death and its wonderful results?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Jesus applied to Himself Isaiah 61:1, 2 when He proclaimed: “ ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’ ” (*Luke 4:16–22, NIV*). To what extent can you apply this passage to yourself when God calls you to proclaim His good news to the world? Discuss with your class how it can be properly and wisely done.

Application: Regarding the Servant of the Lord, God states through Isaiah that “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (*Isa. 53:6, NIV*), “my righteous servant will justify many” (*Isa. 53:11, NIV*), and “he bore the sin of many” (*Isa 53:12, NIV*). Discuss with your class how you can reconcile this seeming discrepancy between “all” and “many”? Discuss with your class how this can be done properly and wisely (see how the apostle Paul applied Isaiah 49:6b to his situation according to Acts 13:47).

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Isaiah uses rich imagery to describe the mission and accomplishments of the Servant of the Lord in these five passages we have studied. What are the advantages of such illustrative teaching?

Activities:

1 Isaiah graphically pictures the suffering of the Servant of the Lord and goes through the most vital points by using a vast biblical vocabulary. Ask your class to rewrite chapter 53 of the book of Isaiah, using our modern language to correctly describe what happened in the life of Christ. How can one best express in today’s culture the meaning of His victorious substitutionary death for us? Be faithful to the biblical text, but express the same thoughts in a clear, simple, and different way. Ask your class to come up with modern, twenty-first-century pictures, metaphors, similes, and concepts that would speak to the mind and heart of our postmodern society. Be creative. Especially aim this exercise toward the youth. How can we communicate to them the depth of this extraordinary message?

2 Find in your hymnal songs about Christ’s death and its results for us. Invite your class to learn the best ones by heart.