

## Message The Suffering Servant

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, April 3, 2026, Good Friday)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. **Amen.**

*“Who has believed what we have heard?  
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”* (Isaiah 53:1)

That was the question, first posed by Second Isaiah, or Isaiah of the Exile as I like to call him. Question posed in this 4th Servant Song, on the nature of suffering, not in general, as suffering of humanity, but in the specific, as in the suffering of the Servant of the Lord, the suffering of one particular servant, Jesus Christ the Son of Man, the Son of God. Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

It was revealed to the disciples of Jesus, time and time again, yet they did not believe. In fact, if one were to read the Gospel of Matthew, from the perspective of the disbelief of disciples, one would gain a new appreciation as to why Jesus had to rebuke Peter, in the sternest manner possible: *“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”* (Matthew 16:23)

It was revealed to the religious authorities, in the days of Jesus, the Pharisees, teachers of the Law, high priests of Jerusalem, yet they did not believe. Even when Jesus declared to them: *“From now on you will see the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”* (Matthew 26:64), they still resisted. I think the high priest tore his clothes, and declared the statement as blasphemy.

They could not believe standing before them, this unimpressive man, is none other than what was prophesied from the days of old, from the days of Isaiah—the long awaited Messiah.

*For “he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”* (Isaiah 53:2)

He was, after all, a poor carpenter, uneducated in the Torah, at least not from a reputable Rabbi, and from Nazareth of all places, where nothing good ever comes out of.

*“He was despised and rejected by others;  
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity.” (Isaiah 53:3)*

They call him Beelzebul (another word for Satan), for they accused him of driving out demons by the power of the devil. They call him law-breaker, for Jesus did have a different take, perhaps a less than literal understanding of the Sabbath, and he certainly has no patience for customs regarding ritual purity, nor traditions of the elders. Out of jealousy and fear, these religious leaders resisted Jesus every step of the way, “

*as one from whom others hide their faces,  
he was despised, and we held him of no account.” (v.3)*

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Even those from his hometown, that no good Nazareth, could not stand him, would not accept him. “*Is not this the carpenter’s son?*”, they snickered. “*Is not his mother called Mary?*”, the disgraced harlot that Joseph put up with for far too long. “*And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?*” (Matthew 13:55-56) Where did he find the gall to preach at us, with wisdom and deeds of power? Surely he is no better than us.

*“Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases,  
yet we account him stricken, struck down by God,  
and afflicted.” (Isaiah 53:4)*

We are no strangers to sufferings, to infirmities, diseases, afflictions and mortality. Ever since the fall from Eden, the paradise lost, suffering has been a large part of the human condition, very much part and parcel of being human. We gripe and complain, we cry and lament, we bargain with ourselves, or with powers beyond us, all to no avail, in an desperate attempt to lessen suffering

We devise systems to mitigate sufferings. Rene Girard, the French philosopher, has this theory on the scapegoating mechanism, whereby a community blames all its ills on a victim, then drive that victim out, or better yet, kill it, thus restoring peace of the community, albeit only temporarily. It is an interesting theory, in fact, didn't Caiaphas the high priest said something to the same effect, in John 11:50, "*It is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.*"

Who would've believed that God the Father would not be dismayed by such a scheme, would rather offer up the Son for precisely such purpose?

*"But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed."* (Isaiah 53:5)

Sufferings of the guilty is punitive, or sometimes called retributive—the deserved punishment for a mistake that a person has made. Sufferings of the innocent is unjust, unmerited. We may cry or lament; we may raise our fists in anger, in protest, but if we are truly honest, who amongst us are truly guiltless, truly innocent, as the Apostle Paul puts it so clearly, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" (Roman 3:23)

Often times people mistake me as unsympathetic. That's furtherest from the truth, for I have as much sympathy as Jesus has for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for the city itself, as he laments, "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate.*" (Matthew 23:37-38)

*For "all we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way."* (Isaiah 53:6).

All but one, the one and only, the Son of Man, the only begotten Son of God. He was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1). Though he existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, to hold on

to, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness (Philippians 2:6-7).

Human beings devise schemes in order to transcend, to be more god-like. Where I came from, back home in Taiwan, that's all the rage. Some would equate the self-emptying mindset of Buddhists as equivalent to that of Christ. I would say, look closer. Whereas the Eastern religious and philosophical mindset is all about self-emptying transcendence to be more god-like, the One and Only Triune God sends the Son to become flesh, "*and being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.*" (Philippians 2:8),

*"and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* (v.6)

Theologians call it redemptive suffering—the suffering of the one and only innocent for not the good of many, but for the redemption of all.

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? To us, here and now. We are the recipients of this good news, on this Good Friday, where we accompanied the Christ to the cross, and witnessed his last cry, his dying breath. "*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised*", as reported by the author of Matthew (27:51-52).

And if that is not incredible enough, we watch in disbelief of a centurion, who may've been the one who gave the order, to nail Jesus to the cross, and out of his mouth, proclaiming this amazing statement of faith, "**Truly this man was the Son of God!**"

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**