

# That Which Pleases God

## An Examination of What God Delights In

### 6 God Takes Pleasure in Crushing His Son

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February 9, 2014

#### Isaiah 53

**1** Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

**2** For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

**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.

**4** Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

**5** 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.

**6** 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.

**7** He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

**8** By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?

**9** His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

**10** But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

**11** As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

**12** Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

To the Glory of God

Something very troubling has emerged from these Messages on That Which Pleases God. Since the first of the year- we have seen that God has Pleasure in His Son- that God Almighty delights in the Glory of His Own Perfections reflected back to Him in the Countenance of Jesus Christ. And we have seen that God delights in His Sovereign Freedom- that the Lord is in Heaven and does all that He pleases and that God is the only truly "free" Being in the Universe.

And we have seen that God rejoices over the Work of His Hands- the day by day operation of the Universe that God created that declares His Glory in a thousand different ways. We have seen that God has pleasure in His Fame, His Pristine Reputation, and that He means to make a Name for Himself in all the world and win a Confession for the Glory of His Grace from every people and every tribe and every language and every nation under Heaven. And we have seen that, as a means to that end- God has had the utmost Pleasure in Sovereign Election from before Creation- that He genuinely delights to reveal the Glory of His Son to inferior unworthy sinners and to call out for Himself an unlikely people- who will make their boast only in the Lord.

Clearly God has a great Passion to promote His Glory. But the troubling thing that emerges in all of this is that God has chosen wicked sinners. The God of the Bible is honoring and blessing and exalting a people who are patently unworthy and undeserving of that Calling. And so we are confronted with two very important aspects that we must always keep in mind. First of all- the very essence of sin is the belittling of God's Glory. So for example- when the Bible says in **Romans 3:23:**

**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

... we must not think that this means that we have all struggled real hard to reach the top of the pinnacle of giving God the Glory that He so justly deserves- and simply fell just slightly below that high mark as though our efforts were noble and righteous. That is *not* what this verse means. The Apostle Paul wrote this to tell all sinners- both Jews and Gentiles the humiliating Truth that “falling short” of the Glory of God is to spit in God’s Face; it is to take God’s majestic Glory and His Perfect Holiness and to stomp it into the ground and grind our dirty feet on top of it in disgust. “Falling short” here is to insult God to the highest, it is to trample on the perfect Nature and Character of God, it is to bring shame to His Reputation and shake our fist in God’s face and dare Him to do anything about it. Falling short is exchanging God’s Glory for something else. So the very best definition of **Romans 3:23** is **Romans 1:22&23** that says:

**22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,**

**23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.**

So with that in mind- think about a God Who is infinitely committed to promote the Worth of His Name and the Greatness of His Glory in all that He does- is now engaging all His Powers to bring the enemies of His Name into everlasting joy and honor! It is a staggering proposition.

Make no mistake about this, dear friends- sin is diametrically opposed to the Glory of God. Sin is the failure to prize the Glory of God above everything else. So in our sin- we have gladly exchanged the Magnificence of God for something else: for base images of glory- like a new home or car or VCR or a computer or a vacation or impressive resumés or money or sex or whatever makes our ticker tick more than the speechless wonder of God’s Glory.

That’s what sin is. And that is what all the people are like- who God has chosen to save. And even *after* God makes them His Own- they often bring disgrace upon His Name by their inconsistency and half-hearted response to Jesus’ Command to love God with their whole heart. So the troubling thing is that God is so enthusiastic about adopting and exalting people whose sinfulness is a blight on His Name.

At first glance- it seems schizophrenic. The Bible makes God out to love His Name and His Glory with Omnipotent Energy and unbounded Joy. And then it also pictures Him choosing God-belittling sinners for His Court, and rejoicing over the very people who have despised His Glory and cheapened His Name.

And I really don't believe it is possible to grasp the central drama of the Bible until we begin to feel this tension. We have to understand that until the coming of Jesus Christ- the Bible is like a symphony with two great themes:

1. The Theme of God's great Passion to promote His Own Glory and the Fame of His Name in all the Universe
2. The Theme of God's inscrutable electing Love for horrible sinners- who have gladly and repeatedly scorned that very Glory

And these two themes create a serious problem that has to be answered:

How can an infinitely Righteous God save infinitely unrighteous sinners without belittling His Own Glory?

The Glory of God or the Fame of God's great Name is the single most important aspect of God. It is the very focus of His Existence. It is why God does what he does. God is passionate about His Glory and He is passionate that He be magnified and worshipped and adored. And as sinners- we have horribly offended God's Glory.

So how does God simply forgive us without doing injustice to His Glory? If God simply forgives sinners- He is no longer Just and yet is God is Just- then nobody gets saved. This is called, "The Greatest Theological Conundrum" or "The Great Theological Paradox" that no religion in the history of the world can answer besides Biblical Christianity because we are the only religion that has Jesus Christ.

So these are the two great Themes that carry along the symphony of all history. They weave and penetrate everything that is done and said in all 66 Books of the Bible. And from this- we know that some awesome Composer is at work here. But for centuries before Christ- nobody ever heard the Resolution. Under the Old Covenant- the

harmony always escaped them and they were told to simply wait and to hope.

So the Life and Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the Resolution of this magnificent symphony of history. In the Death of Jesus- the two great Themes of God's Love- for His Own Glory and His Love to redeem sinners are finally and completely resolved. And as in all good symphonies- there had been hints and suggestions all along of this final Resolution. And that is what we find here in **Isaiah 53**- that was written as God the Holy Spirit wondrously moved upon the Prophet Isaiah to pen it down on a scroll with a quill or a stylus some seven hundred years before Jesus was born.

God's Pleasure in His Name and His Pleasure in doing good to wicked sinners meet together and marry as God takes Pleasure in the Crushing of the Son of God. And before I quote **Isaiah 53:10**- I want to show you two other Biblical texts that affect the way I translate this verse. First, consider **Isaiah 1:11** that says:

**“What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.**

... and the word for “**pleasure**” here in this verse is the same Hebrew word used in the *first* line of **Isaiah 53:10**,

**But the LORD was pleased To crush Him...**

Then consider **Isaiah 62:4**. Here the Lord says to His people,

**It will no longer be said to you, “Forsaken,” Nor to your land will it any longer be said, “Desolate”; But you will be called, “My delight is in her,” And your land, “Married”; For the LORD delights in you, And *to Him* your land will be married.**

And when God says, “**My delight is in her**,” here- the noun used for “**delight**” is the very same Hebrew word used in the *last* line of **Isaiah 53:10**,

**... And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.**

So based on that- here is the correct translation of **Isaiah 53:10**:  
The LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief [or: caused His pain],  
when He makes Himself an Offering for sin- He shall see His offspring and He  
shall prolong His days; The Pleasure of the LORD shall prosper [be  
accomplished] in His Hand.

So this is a prophecy and a picture of Jesus Christ- crucified and  
raised from the dead- seven centuries before it happens. The “**crushing**”  
is the horrible torture and crucifixion and death of Jesus as He willingly  
made Himself an Offering for sin. It is a *crushing* unto death. And this  
is confirmed in **Isaiah 53:8&9**,

**“He was cut off out of the land of the living ... His grave was assigned with  
wicked men”**

And again in verse 12:

**“... He poured out Himself to death...”**

Now the reference to God “**prolonging His days**” in verse 10 is a  
reference to Christ’s Resurrection to eternal life after death. And this is  
confirmed in verse 12 by the prophecy that God will “**divide the booty  
[spoil] with the strong**” even though He had already died. And when it  
says “He will see His offspring” it means that the fruit of His Suffering  
and Crushing is that many people will be saved from sin and death.  
And this is confirmed in verse 11: “**As a result of the anguish of His soul,  
He will see *it and* be satisfied By His knowledge the Righteous One, My  
Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.**”

Now the crucial thing to notice in solving the complexities of  
Redemptive History is that this is all the Work of God the Father.

**But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief;**

I have a friend in the jail ministry at the Harrison County Jail  
and I have been talking to him over the past few years about this issue  
and he told me of a very powerful moment when he was speaking on  
Easter Sunday and during his message on the death of Christ, he  
stopped and asked the inmates, “*Who do you think killed Jesus?*” One  
said, “*The Jews.*” Another said, “*The soldiers.*” Another said, “*Pilate.*”

Another said, "*Judas.*" My friend said, "*No, I don't think you're right.*" They said, "*Who then?*" He said, "*His Father killed Him.*" There was a very obvious and long silence. And then he read from the Bible,

**But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief;**

We have to understand that Jesus was not swept away by the wrath of uncontrolled men. He was crushed by His Own Father. Or, as the Apostle Peter said in **The Acts 2:23:**

**this *Man* [Jesus], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.**

The impact of this terrible Truth held the attention of the inmates- some of them knew what it was like to be rejected and "crushed" by an angry, unjust father. And they were eager to hear why God would do such a thing.

So why did God crush His Own Son and bring Him to grief? And why did God *delight* in doing so? He did it to resolve the disconnect between His Love for His Own Glory and His Love for wicked sinners. And we get a glimpse of this in **Isaiah 53:6:**

**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.**

Now notice two things about this:

1. Again (as in verse 10) it is the Lord Who is at work here: **"The LORD—God the Father—has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him."**
2. The issue is iniquity- which is just another word for sin. **"The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

So the Son was crushed because God-dishonoring sin could not be ignored. But why couldn't it be ignored? Why couldn't God just let bygones be bygones and simply forgive us? Why didn't God just issue out a Divine Pardon so that everybody would be Sovereignly forgiven for all their sins? Why did God have to take on flesh and have to be beaten

and spit on and rejected and mocked and whipped and nailed and agonize on a Cross? Why did God have to crush Jesus in order to forgive me? Because God loves the Honor of His Name.

God *will not* and He *cannot* act as though sin- which belittles His Glory- doesn't matter. It cannot simply be swept under the rug of the universe, as though nothing awesome and vitally important was at stake. Sin must be punished. And the Judge of all the earth will do right (**Genesis 18:25**) and He will judge the world in righteousness (**Psalms 9:8**).

So God the Father makes a Covenant with God the Son that He will demonstrate to all the world and throughout all time the infinite Worth and Value of the Father's Glory. How? By taking the Punishment and Suffering on *Himself* that our sin deserved. And **Isaiah 53:5** makes the substitution even more explicit:

**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.**

And Verse 12 says,

**Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.**

And verse 8 says

**He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?**

... and Verse 9 makes plain that the crushing was *not* because of some sin that was in Jesus:

**His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.**

So it was not for His *Own* sin that the Father crushed the Son. It was because He wanted to show us Mercy and wanted to forgive and



heal and save and rejoice over us with loud singing. But there was a problem. God is Righteous. And that means His Heart was filled with a Love for the infinite Worth and Value of His Own Glory and God cannot ever do anything that will belittle His Own Glory.

But we are sinners. And that means that our hearts are filled with God-belittling Affections and Actions . So fulfill His Love toward sinners and save them- and at the same time magnify the Worth of His Own Glory- God lays our sin on Jesus and abandons Him to the shame and slaughter of the Cross.

And the very clearest and most important Biblical statement of this Truth is found in **Romans 3:23–26**- please turn there. Now if I were ever asked, *“Brother Blair- what is the most important paragraph in the entire Bible?”* I think this is the paragraph I would name because it goes to the very *root* of the Christian Gospel and it lays bare the Heart of God like few other texts. If there is a moment in the symphony of Biblical Revelation when the two contrasting Themes of God’s Perfect Justice and God’s Infinite Mercy come together into a magnificent crescendo of both unity and harmony- it is here in **Romans 3:23–26**. Read it with me.

**23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

**24** being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

**25** whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

**26** for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Now this amazing passage gives account for the apparent miscarriage of Justice in the Gospel that the Jews called, “The Scandal of Grace”. You see, God’s Justice operates on the Divine Principle laid down in **Proverbs 17:15**,

**He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD .**

We impeach judges who acquit the guilty. Our moral sensibilities are outraged when wrongdoing is given legal sanction or when people in positions of power and authority abuse that power and get away with it. It is wrong for people who do wrong to not be punished. And when we see that happen- we rise to our feet and we point our finger at the unjust Judge and we scream out in righteous indignation, *"That's not Justice!"* And yet at the heart of the Christian Gospel stands this scandalous sentence:

**Romans 4:5**  
**God justifies the ungodly**

God completely and eternally acquits those who are patently guilty! And that is the Gospel. But how can it be right for God to do that? **Romans 3:24** gives part of the answer. It says that the ungodly are acquitted or justified on the basis of a Divine Transaction that happens in the experience of Jesus Christ. This transaction is called "Redemption."

**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;**

So Redemption refers to a kind of "purchase" or "ransom" that was paid in the Death of Jesus Christ. Something happened in the Death of Jesus that is so stupendous that it now serves as the basis for the acquittal of millions and millions of wicked sinners who trust Christ. Well, what happened in this Redemption? What was the Divine Transaction that took place when Jesus died? Paul gives the answer in verses 25&26.

**25** whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

**26** for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

... so the **"Propitiation"** in the Blood of Jesus Christ (His Death) was to "demonstrate" or "vindicate" or "satisfy" God's Righteousness.

So first, we see that it is God the Father Who puts Christ forward to die.

**God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood**

... or as **Isaiah 53:10** says:

**It pleased the Lord to crush Him.**

... next, we see that the Reason God gave His Son up to death was to make a “**propitiation**”. And this word is important because other words like “expiation” (RSV) and “sacrifice of atonement” (NIV) simply do not press forward the concept of “appeasing the Wrath of God” which is in this word. So the point of the word, “propitiation” is that God’s Wrath is against the ungodly- rightly so- because of the way they have desecrated His Glory. And so if any of these guilty sinners are going to be saved- a way must be found for God’s Just Wrath against their sins to be vindicated without belittling God’s Glory and Reputation.

And that is exactly what happened in the Death of Jesus on the Cross. And that is what “propitiation” means: God Sovereignly averted His Own Wrath against sinners through the death of His Son.<sup>3</sup>

And just how this happened and why it had to happen is explained further in the last part of verse 25:

***This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;***

And here we see very clearly the problem that the Justification of the ungodly caused for the Apostle Paul. God’s Righteousness is called into question when God passes over sins. This very moment God is passing over the sins of those who trust in Jesus (as verse 26 and 4:5 show). But not only that- God has been doing this same thing for *generations* of those who trust Him. This is clear from **Romans 4:6–8**,

**6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:**

**7 "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.**

**8 "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."**

God passed over "former sins" when He acquitted sinners like Abraham (**Genesis 15:6**) and David (**Psalms 32:1&2**) and many others (**Hebrews 11:4, 7**). And so **Romans 3:25** says that because of this- God's Righteousness is called into question.

And the reason God's Righteousness is questioned when He passes over sin and does not judge it- is because sin is such a blatant attack on the Worth of His Glory. And God's Righteousness is His unswerving Commitment to uphold the Worth of that Glory and promote its Fame in all the world. So when sin is treated as though it is inconsequential- then the Glory of God becomes inconsequential. When God passes over sin- it looks as though He is agreeing that His Glory is of little or no value. But if God acts in such a way as to deny the infinite Value of His Own Glory- then He commits the ultimate outrage- God would be desecrating what is infinitely Holy and He would be blaspheming what is infinitely Sacred. And that would force God Himself to join the sinners of **Romans 1:23** and God would be exchanging the Glory of the immortal God for the creature.

And this prospect is so terrible that if it ever came to pass- there could be no Gospel at all and no hope for guilty sinners precisely because there would be no Righteous God.

And yet in spite of this great risk- God has chosen sinners for Himself. And He is determined to pass over their sins and bring them into His Presence and give them everlasting joy. And He has done this even though their sin desecrates His Glory.

So how does God accomplish both Designs of His Will? How does God continually uphold the infinite Worth and Value of His Own Glory and never at any point allow the Fame of His Own Reputation to be diminished in the least and yet save wicked sinners? The answer is given very clearly in **Romans 3:25&26**.

**25** whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

**26** for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In other words, God would *not* simply sweep the sins of His chosen people under the rug of the universe. If God was simply going to acquit guilty, God-belittling sinners by faith- then something terrible and awesome had to happen to vindicate His Allegiance to the Worth of His Own Name. And that something was the Death of His Son. This Death demonstrated the inexpressible Passion God has for the Worth of His Glory and for the vindication of His Righteousness. And that is why it pleased the Lord to crush Jesus.

So exactly how did the Death of Christ do that? Paul doesn't spell this out for us in detail, but there are clear pointers in other parts of Scripture. We know that everything Jesus did in life and death He did for the Glory of His Father. For example, as Jesus approaches the hour of His Death, He says,

**27 "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.**

**28 Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."**

... so the very Purpose for which Jesus came to the hour of His Death was to glorify the Father. Jesus wants us to see that His willingness to lose His Life is because of His Love for the Glory of the Father. And this is how the Worth of God's Glory is magnified in the Death of Jesus.

Again, when Judas had left the Last Supper and Jesus' Death was imminent- He said,

**John 13:31b**

**... "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him;**

This is the basic transaction happening in the last hours of Jesus' Suffering. In Jesus' great Prayer in **John 17**- He views His Death as virtually accomplished and says,

**John 17:4**

**I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.**

So all of Jesus' Work was designed to honor the Worth of His Father's Glory. Everything Jesus suffered- He suffered for the sake of God's Glory. Therefore, all His pain and shame and humiliation and dishonor served to magnify the Father's Glory, because they showed how infinitely valuable God's Glory is- that such a Loss should be suffered to demonstrate its Worth. So when we look at the wracking pain and death of the perfectly innocent and infinitely worthy Son of God on the Cross and we hear that He endured it all so that the Glory of His Father, desecrated by sinners, might be restored- then we begin to know that God has not denied the Value of His Own Glory, He has not been untrue to Himself, He has not ceased to uphold His Own Honor and display His Glory, God is Just—and the Justifier of the ungodly. Dear friends- this is an unspeakably wonderful Truth!

So the very foundation of our Justification- our acquittal, our forgiveness- is not some flimsy sentimentality in God, nor is it a shallow claim of human worth. God is not a sap that just melts when it comes to His people so that He doesn't care that we have sinned against Him. No, the massive Rock of God's unswerving Commitment to uphold the Worth of His Own Glory and to promote the praise of His Holy Name and to vindicate His Pristine Righteousness is the foundation of our Redemption. So even though it may sound backward- it is the God-centeredness of God that is the Foundation of His Grace to the ungodly. If God were not committed first to vindicate the Worth of His Own Glory- there would be no Gospel and no hope- for there would be no glorious God.

Now what is tragic is that this vision of God's atoning Work in the death of his Son is rejected and even scorned by many people in the modern church. In their mad rush to uphold the dignity of Man- they belittle the Majesty of God in their blind ambition to promote the worth of Man- they attack the infinite Worth of God. And I believe that our understanding will be deeper and our convictions stronger and our passion for God's Glory warmer if we take note of this rejection and know why it is so very wrong.

Now I want to be faithful to warn you that there is a heresy that we should all be well versed in because this heresy attacks both the concept of God's Righteousness and the need for the Atonement and it is called, "Universalism"- the notion that everybody will eventually be saved and hell itself will be emptied out and some Universalists teach

that even the devil himself will be saved. Perhaps one of the most famous Universalists was a man named, George MacDonald- who was a man who was repelled by the Biblical vision of God's Righteousness and the meaning of Christ's Death. Even though he died back in 1905- he is not irrelevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century because his influence continues significantly through his popular writings. And some Christian philosophers and writers today seem to follow him very closely.

George MacDonald is best known today for his popular novels that have been reprinted in Americanized form from their original Scottish coloring. And his credibility has been catapulted into the heights of evangelical affection by the amazing quotes of C. S. Lewis in the anthology he put together of MacDonald's quotations.

And it is hard not to admire MacDonald's radical commitment to following Jesus Christ. His novels are popular not only because he tells a good story, but because he tells stories about the good. People come away from the novels often with a new zeal to be pure. And so it would be much easier to criticize his view of the Atonement if he were a bad man. But he was *not* a bad man- but he was a Universalist.

MacDonald was born on December 10, 1824, the second son of a Scottish tenant farmer at Huntly, in the Scottish Highlands. He was educated in King's College, Aberdeen, and Highbury Theological College, London. In 1851 he married Louisa Powell. He served as Pastor of Trinity Congregational Church from 1851 to 1853 when he was forced to resign partly because he had come to embrace "Universalism"- the heretical view that all men would eventually be saved and that hell itself- while real and terrible now- would have a purifying effect on the worst of sinners and eventually bring them to repentance and eternal life.

For some years MacDonald preached from rented quarters to any who would listen. In the early 1860s he began a literary career that would last the rest of his life and that would result in fifty-two published volumes of poems and novels and sermons, many of which are available today. But here is what MacDonald said about the high view of God in the writings of Jonathan Edwards:

"From all copies of Jonathan Edwards' portrait of God, however faded by time, however softened by the use of less glaring pigments, I turn with loathing."

Now for more than twenty years, all my Biblical studies and all my ministry and meditation have led me to love the God of Jonathan Edwards—whom I believe with all my heart to be the God and Father of Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture and ruling right now over all the universe, knowing the very hairs of my head and bearing all my burdens. So I was bewildered that anybody who would write about God could reject so thoroughly Edwards' lofty and glorious words of the Majesty of God and I set out to find out why MacDonald said this. The result of my study was the sad discovery that MacDonald had viciously thrown away the Biblical teaching on the Justice of God and how it came to expression in the Crucifixion of Christ and had embraced the heresy of Universalism.

MacDonald taught that since God created a world in which sin happened- His Justice demands that He *destroy* sin in everybody and *not* simply punish it. You need to know that Universalism rejects the concept of God's Justice or God's Righteousness which demands appropriate punishment or deserved Wrath against sin. Instead this heresy says that the punishment or suffering of a sinner does not settle accounts.

Now there are certain consequences that always follow from these Universalist convictions about God's Justice. Universalism rejects two critical issues:

- ✓ The Biblical view of the Atonement that says God's Justice demanded the Punishment of sin
- ✓ The Biblical view that says Christ bore that Punishment as our Substitute

These two views *always* go together. If God's Justice means that He is bound to simply *destroy* sin and not *punish* it- then there is no necessary Condemnation for Christ to bear for us and that means that there is no Hell of Eternal Retribution.

Universalism teaches that eventually "hell" would bring all men to repentance and that all would eventually be saved. Universalism also rejects the kind of Atonement that I have unfolded in this Sermon and that is clearly taught in the Bible. And this error strikes right at the heart of our Faith and attacks the very ground of the Gospel.



MacDonald and other Universalists speak of some kind of Atonement- but it is one that we make for *ourselves*. In the Universalist view- the Death of Christ is *not* Jesus taking our place- but simply providing us with inspiration so we can live a better life. For the Universalist- The Atonement is simply God making up for the evil that He mistakenly allowed in the first place.

And this is a massive perversion of Biblical Truth concerning the Cross. It is right in affirming that the Death of Christ is designed to overcome sin and not just forgive sin. But if what we have seen earlier in **Romans 3:24–26** is correct then MacDonald and the Universalist are deeply wrong about the very essence of what happened when Jesus died. God is indeed a God of vengeance (**Romans 12:19**). He does indeed need to be reconciled to Man—that is, His Wrath against sinners needs to be averted.

So put the words of William Childs Robinson- the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Presbyterian warrior who fought faithfully for over 60 years to stop the theological liberalism that attacked the Church and preserve Biblical Christianity- over against MacDonald's denial of this need. Robinson wrote:

Man's rebellious enmity against God (**Colossians 1:12; Romans 8:7f**) has called forth his holy enmity against evil (**1Corinthians 15:25f; Romans 11:28; James 4:4**), his wrath (**Romans 1:18; 2:5, 8–9; Ephesians 2:3, 5; Colossians. 3:6**), his judgments (**Romans 1:24–32; 2:3, 16; 3:6, 19; 2Corinthians 5:10**), his vengeance (**Romans 12:19; 2Thessalonians 2:8**), and the curse of the broken law (**Galatians 3:10**). The wrath of God in the final judgment stands in immediate connection with the enmity which is removed by the reconciliation (**Romans 5:9–10**). Thus God so acted in giving his Son to be made sin and a curse for us that his wrath was averted and his righteousness made manifest even in forgiving believers (**Romans 3:25&26**). The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ assures them that the sentence of condemnation is no longer against them.

It is a great tragedy that MacDonald and his Universalist followers construct a concept of Divine Justice that seems to bear good tidings in overthrowing hell but backfires with the bad tidings that the Death of Jesus accomplishes no more for me than what it inspires me to accomplish for myself. It is a high price to pay for the overthrow of something that is inescapably Biblical. It is no act of Love to deny the

reality of a terrible future which men and women can escape if they know it is coming. And it is no act of Love for Christ to reduce His awesome sin-bearing Substitution into simply a "model" of martyrdom. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish theologian- James Denney- warned many years ago that if we say God would still be to us what He is, apart from any reconciling Value which the Death of Christ has for God, then

"This is really to put Christ out of Christianity altogether."

Therefore, for the sake of love to Christ and love to Man, I find myself running away from Universalists like George MacDonald to the friend of my soul- Jonathan Edwards- who allows me to stand on the unchanging Rock of Biblical Truth and I encourage you to do the same. I am grateful that neither MacDonald nor his contemporary followers in the heresy of Universalism have even come close to shaking the Biblical Foundations of Divine Righteousness demonstrated so magnificently in Edwards's two works, *The End for Which God Created the World* and *Concerning the Necessity and Reasonableness of the Christian Doctrine of Satisfaction for Sin*.

And my prayer is that more and more people will come to see the utterly awesome and liberating Truth that the Son of God **"bore the sin of many."** **"He was stricken for the transgression of my people"** (Isaiah 53:12, 8). May the message of Isaiah spread to every people on the earth: **"He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... smitten by God and afflicted.... The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.... It pleased the LORD to crush Him"** (Isaiah 53:4-6, 10).

So **Isaiah 53:10** teaches that the single great transaction between God the Father and God the Son that took place in the Death of Jesus on the Cross was the Father's Pleasure. **It pleased the Lord to crush Him.** Or as Paul said in **Ephesians 5:2**, the sacrifice of Christ was **"a fragrant aroma"** to God.

So the question we may be better able to answer now is, *"How could the Father delight in the sacrifice of His Own Son?" Why would God delight in that? Didn't God love Jesus infinitely? So why would and how could God take any pleasure in the crushing of Jesus?"*

And one part of the answer is stressed at the end of verse 10, namely, that God's Pleasure is in what the Son *accomplishes* by dying. It says,

**“The good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.”**

So God's Pleasure is not so much in the horrific Suffering of the Son in and of itself- but in the great and final Success of what the Son would accomplish by and through His Suffering. For example, it says at the end of **Isaiah 53:10**:

**He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.**

This means that by His Death- Jesus births spiritual offspring and He goes before them into Eternity- prolonging his days forever. He rises from the dead and says in the words of **Hebrews 2:13**,

**Here I am and the children God has given me.**

So the way God's Pleasure prospers in the Crushing of the Son is by creating what we might call the “offspring of the cross.” So who are these people? **Isaiah 53:11** describes who they are- in virtually the same terms as those used by Paul in **Romans 3:24**. They are justified sinners—people who are reckoned righteous because of the Death of Jesus.

### **Isaiah 53:11**

**As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.**

So the Pleasure of God that prospers in the Hand of God's Servant- the Lord Jesus Christ- is the justification of the ungodly in a way that doesn't diminish the Righteousness of God. So this is the first part of the answer to why the Father was pleased to crush the Son.

But I think another part of the answer must also be what we have seen in **Romans 3:25&26**- that the depth of the Son's Suffering was the measure of His Love for the Father's Glory. It was the Father's righteous Allegiance to His Own Name that made Recompense for sin necessary. So when the Son willingly took the suffering of that Recompense on Himself- every footfall on the way to Calvary echoed through all of Creation with this Message:

The Glory of God is of infinite Value!

So when the Father forsook the Son and handed Him over to the Curse of the Cross and did not lift a finger to spare Him pain- He had not ceased to love the Son. In that very moment when the Son was taking upon himself everything that God hates in us and in the very moment that God was forsaking our Lord to that horrible Death- right then- the Father knew that the Measure of His Son's Suffering was the depth of His Son's Love for the Father's Glory. And in that Love- the Father took His deepest Pleasure.

My dear brothers and sisters- the Crucifixion of Jesus was both a breathtaking and a mysterious Event. In that hour- Jesus **“became a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13)** and yet in that same moment- when God's Curse rested most heavily on Jesus because of our sin- the Father's Love for his Son reached explosive proportions. This is why Jesus, with His dying Breath, could say,

**Luke 23:46**

**“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”**

So even though He knew that the Wrath of His Father was being poured out on Him without measure- He also knew that without any doubt- He was bearing that Agony for the Father's Glory and that the Father loved Him fully for it.

**John 10:17**

**“For this reason the Father loves me,” Jesus said, “because I lay down my life, that I may take it again”**

And the Father rewarded his Son for the very Suffering which was the Father's Curse:

**Hebrews 2:9**

**We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death**

When Jesus died- He glorified the Father's Name better and more fully than anyone or anything has ever or will ever do and at the same time- He saved His Father's people. And since the Father has overflowing Pleasure in the Honor of His Name, and since He fully delights with unbounded Joy in the election of a sinful people for Himself- how then shall He not delight in the unspeakable crushing of his Son by which these two magnificent divine Joys are reconciled and made one!

I close with a parable that the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones gave to his Church right before he died. Lloyd Jones said,

Once there was a land ruled by a wicked prince. He had come from a foreign country and enslaved all the people of the land and made them miserable with hard labor in his coal mines across the deep canyon. He had built a massive trestle for the trains that carried his slaves across the canyon to the mines each morning, and it was heavily guarded.

Two men were still free in this kingdom—one old and the other young. They lived on an inaccessible cliff overlooking the trestle. They hated the trestle. At last they resolved together to blow it up and destroy the slave labor of the enemy prince. They planned and they prayed and they reminded themselves of the reality of heaven.

The night came when the deed would be done. Their hearts were pounding with joy. It was a hard plan. It would be possible to time the trek of the trestle guard so that the explosive could be carried quickly to the vulnerable spot on the trestle. But there would be no time for the carrier of the explosives to return. It was certain that he would be seen and the plan foiled if he tried to return. To make sure the trestle blew up the two men agreed that the young man would detonate it by hand on the trestle. And he would blow up with it.

But they believed in heaven, and they loved the people of the land. And so the honor of this sacrifice made their hearts leap with joy. The hour came. They folded up the map of their strategy, stood from the table and embraced each other. When the young man got to the door, he turned with the explosive strapped to his back, looked at the old man, and said, "I love you, Father." And the old man took a deep breath—with joy—and said, "I love

you too, Son and the explosion that ripped the boy to shreds- freed the people and broke the power of evil that had enslaved them.”

Amen. Let's pray