

Big idea: The God of Compassion is our only Saviour

Introduction

'Kelly Arnett Somerville says her mother had the epitome of a bad death — drowning in her own blood in a hospital bed in front of her children. Lucid and in pain, 63-year-old Eileen Keogh succumbed to a rare disease her daughter said robbed her of her quality of life and dignity.

Ms Somerville, a nurse, said there was nothing palliative care specialists could do to relieve her mother's suffering from amyloidosis and months of nauseating agony.

Amyloidosis (am-uh-loi-DO-sis) is a rare disease that occurs when a substance called amyloid builds up in your organs. Amyloid is an abnormal protein that is produced in your bone marrow and can be deposited in any tissue or organ.

It can affect the heart, kidneys, liver, spleen, nervous system and digestive tract. At its most severe it can lead to life-threatening organ failure.

There's no cure.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/amyloidosis/symptoms-causes/syc-20353178>

"She was alert, she was in pain and she was suffering, suffering terribly," Ms Somerville said. "My mum died what I call the epitome of a bad death, she drowned in her own blood ... whilst watching me, her 'nurse', beseeching me with her eyes to help her.

"She was the most important patient I ever had in my entire life and I could not help her. I will live with that for the rest of my life."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-20/euthanasia-bill-introduced-to-vic-parliament/8963360>

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That's an awful story, isn't it? Seeing someone you love in pain is so hard.

Despite the division about euthanasia, I think most people on both sides of the argument for and against, agree that if they were at the bedside of a loved

one who was in terrible pain, the way Kelly Somerville was, they would want to do something.

Something to stop the pain, to take it away.

Perhaps you're feeling this right now.

Perhaps you are feeling helpless as you care for someone you love very much.

There's a sense of sorrow and grief and sadness, of suffering with them.

Compassion.

And this morning we're going to look briefly at Isaiah 53, which is often held up as the blueprint for compassion.

A passage that actually doesn't contain the word compassion, but which perfectly describes the God of compassion.

A passage that Jesus isn't recorded as quoting, even though he quoted Isaiah more than any part of the Old Testament.

A passage that he didn't need to quote because he simply lived it.

He was moved by our pain.

He did something to take it away.

Jesus suffered for us, and He suffered with us.

The God of Compassion is our only Saviour.

Outline

We're going to think about this by understanding:

Our Pain

His Suffering

The Lord's will

Context

This passage is the last of the Servant Songs in the book of Isaiah.

It's part of the answer to the nearly 40 chapters of judgment that come before.

Judgment that was the painful consequence of Israel's failure to be God's covenant people.

God promised Abraham that Israel would live as God's people, in his land, under his rule.

But they had failed their part of the covenant.

So they're decimated as a people, living far from home, under foreign rule.

Isaiah 1 explains what went wrong:

Isaiah 1:2-4

² Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth!

For the LORD has spoken:

"I reared children and brought them up,
but they have rebelled against me.

³ The ox knows its master,
the donkey its owner's manger,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand."

⁴ Woe to the sinful nation,
a people whose guilt is great,
a brood of evildoers,
children given to corruption!
They have forsaken the LORD;
they have spurned the Holy One of Israel
and turned their backs on him.

But even when the relationship is in shreds as he sees **our pain**, God is faithful.

1. Our pain

At the beginning of Isaiah, God looks at his people in exile, people he had forgiven and rescued, people he had reminded and cajoled, people he had provided for and led.

And this is how he describes them: Desolate, injured, afflicted, stripped, laid waste, overthrown, detestable, worthless, fatherless.

This is a father looking at his children. Such pain. Such sorrow.

The particular words that describe Israel's problem, that describe our problem are *transgressions* and *iniquities*.

In verse 5,

but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities

It's not language we really use today, so perhaps its easy to dismiss it as Old Testament, old school, not really my problem.

Transgression has the sense of breaking away, of revolting, of breaking covenant.

Israel did this every time they offered sacrifices to idols, when they failed to worship God alone.

But we can be revolting too.

And it's so simple. When we fail to put God first, refer to him first, check in with first, check our decision and behaviour against his perfect standard, we transgress.

Our turning away from God might not feel like a huge break, but even the smallest tear damages the integrity of the whole and makes it far more vulnerable.

We get a clearer picture of transgression in **verse 6**

We all like sheep, have gone astray

Each of us has turned to his own way

This is pretty confronting, isn't it?

It's reminding us that we're like sheep, small brain, easily lost that we are hopelessly vulnerable, that we so easily turn away from God and that our default is to turn to ourselves, to our own way, to the path of least resistance that feels the best.

And **iniquity** is even harder to relate to, don't you think?

Iniquity has the sense of being perverse, depraved, twisted or distorted.

They're words we'd use to describe a paedophile, a narcissist sociopath, a danger to society.

But really this is just us behind closed doors, these are our private thoughts and desires, the things we would be mortified for anyone to know about us.

Isaiah 64:6 says

⁶ All of us have become like one who is unclean
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;
we all shrivel up like a leaf
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

Is that how we see our sin?

Admitting that we transgress, that we are full of iniquity is deeply uncomfortable isn't it? We know we're not perfect, but surely I'm not that bad?

And when we compare ourselves to the world, we're not worse, in fact we're actually much better than most of our friends or colleagues.

Really so much better. We go to church, we give to charity, we're honest.

But remember one of the definitions of iniquity? Twisted.

We twist our own thinking to get ourselves off the hook.

We sin even as we think about sin.

So, awkward question since we've only just met, but how do you think about your sin? Do you feel the weight of it? The depth and darkness of it? The way it twists and distorts us?

We can only ever appreciate the solution when we understand the problem.

Isaiah describes it as 'our pain'. Do we?

When God looks at our transgressions and iniquities it must be breathtakingly bad.

But even when their rejection of God, when our rejection of God, is at it's most painful, he is faithful. Faithfulness expressed in the compassion of the suffering servant.

2. His suffering

God is like Kelly Somerville, wanting to do something to ease her mother's pain.

As he sees our pain, the mess we're in, the consequences, which will lead to death, he doesn't give up on us.

And unlike the helpless, desperate parents of a terminally ill child, God has the power to save.

It's just incredibly costly.

He pours out the most expensive solution possible, as he had promised he would.

He pours out compassion.

Verse 4

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,

Matthew 8:17

¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

“He took up our infirmities
and bore our diseases.”

And here it's clear that the servant is not Israel or Isaiah himself as he was in other parts of the book.

Here the servant is Jesus, who substitutes himself for Israel, for Isaiah and for us.

And what did that require? What was the cost of his suffering? What does compassion look like?

Jesus suffered physically and mentally, he became powerless, he was cut off and through it all, was completely innocent.

a) It cost him physical, mental, emotional pain.

He suffered.

Glance through vv 3-5

He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

This passage is like a thesaurus for the word suffering.

So many words to describe suffering: despised, rejected, punished, stricken, afflicted, pierced, crushed, oppressed

The fully human Jesus was broken for our sins.

He was the fulfilment of the Law, which demanded a perfect, unblemished offering, to atone for the sins of Israel.

He became in his flesh the bloodied halves of the animals that the Israelites walked between in order to establish a covenant.

By his wounds we are healed.

b) It cost him his identity.

He became powerless

In verse 7

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

This is the King of Kings we're talking about.

This is the Creator, the author of life.

The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

This is power personified but here the cost of compassion is that he chooses not to exercise it.

He chooses to be vulnerable, to be weak, to be silent, not to call down the legions of angels at his disposal, not to release himself from chains.

The Good Shepherd became the sheep.

It's almost impossible to imagine a more humiliating role reversal.

Remember when Jesus was on trial before his crucifixion?

[Matthew 26:62-63](#)

⁶² Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent.

When you hear an account like Matthew’s, do you secretly want Jesus to let them have it, to do some cool miracle to prove who he was?

But then we remember that all of this needed to happen to save us from our sins, to save us from the death that we deserve.

c) The cost was relational.

He was cut off

But hardest of all, he was cut off from the Father, from life itself. And he is life and created life. (John 1:1)

The Godhead, Father, Son and Spirit, has always existed. (Genesis 1:1)

Jesus and the Father are one

John 17:20-23

even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You,

This is what every covenant promise leads to. Perfect relationship with God.

Jesus had it and he gave it up.

Verse 8

By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

Mark 15:33-34

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

One way to think about hell is eternal separation from God.

Jesus experienced hell in our place.

d) It cost his character.

He was innocent

Verse 9

He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Only the sinless Saviour had the capacity, the willingness, the courage, the love, the compassion to do what is impossible for us.

In silence.

1 Peter 2:22

²² "He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

It's hard to imagine what that must be like.

To go from being perfectly pure, white as snow, light and free to being saturated with sin and evil, dark and heavy.

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We hear about rescue stories most weeks. Stories of heroism and bravery.

Just this week, I read about two. One was of an elderly man caught in the surf who was rescued by a stranger who thought he was dead, and the valiant efforts of the lifesaving team to resuscitate him after 30 minutes. Amazing

The other was the story of a young woman who went to Uganda to teach English who ended up adopting 14 young girls because they'd been left in orphanages by their parents who just couldn't provide for them. So impressive.

There's something in both those stories that tells us that the elderly man, the 14 girls needed rescuing, deserved saving.

But Romans 5:8 tells us that **whilst we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

The God of Compassion is our only Saviour.

And his saving work brings God glory.

As we reflect on the depth and cost of God's compassion in Jesus, I wonder how does this change our view of God's character?

How should we respond to our compassionate God?

Let's see how the last few verse help us have a new sense of awe and wonder at what God's compassion means for us.

3. The Lord's will

In verses 10-11 we see two ways that the Lord's will is done.

Two reasons to glorify God.

On *one side* is the compassionate character of God,

on *the other* is our new identity, which is the result of his compassion.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

This is a picture of God's glory and yet there are two things here that seem so counter-intuitive.

In Verse 10, the expression '**the Lord's will**' is sometimes translated '*the Lord was pleased*'.

How does that make sense?

The Lord was pleased to he crush his beloved, only Son?

And then in verse 11 after he has suffered, after Jesus has suffered, he will see the light of life, he will be resurrected
(1 Cor 15:4) **and be satisfied**.

Again, how does this make sense? Jesus wasn't frustrated or bitter, having suffered a blameless death. He was satisfied because he had achieved the Lord's pleasure.

This is a picture of the compassion of the Father mirroring the compassion of the Son.

Have you seen Benjamin Hedstrom's painting 'Transition' in the Compassion Initiative exhibition?

It captures this idea of mirror imaging so beautifully.

The Father and the Son are perfectly aligned: what one desires satisfies the other. And what satisfies one is the desire of the other.

Their feeling of sorrow at our brokenness, their compulsion to act, to lose a son, to lose a life, to lose everything to restore us is a standard of compassion that we'll only ever know once in the history of mankind.

It was the will of the Lord that Jesus would be crushed for our sins.

But because his death dealt with the problem death it's the will of the Lord that he will live again.

We have a God whose compassion is beyond measure, whose compassion is sufficient.

And verses 10-11 show us two of the ways that God's compassion to save overflows in blessing to us.

We have new identities.

In **verse 10**

He will see his offspring.

We are his offspring.

We are born again to new life.

We are his children and he is our God.

In **verse 11**

by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,

We're justified.

Our sin, our transgression our iniquities are wiped away, as if they never existed.

We are no longer guilty, no longer condemned but justified, made right with God.

And what great timing as we remember the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this month, to remind ourselves that we are justified by faith alone.

What Martin Luther called Sola Fide.

I imagine many of you here today follow the Lord Jesus. I hope these promises give you renewed hope and encouragement to persevere in your Christian walk. Because when you have a new identity you can live a new life.

John Piper said

When you read the story of your salvation in detail 700 years before it happened, you have not only revelation, but validation.

Kelly's mum was really sick but it wasn't because of anything she had done. It wasn't her personal transgressions or iniquity that threatened her earthly life.

But all our transgressions, all our iniquities put our eternal life at risk.

Without a saviour, we are lost, sheep without a shepherd.

What Jesus died for us, when he did his Father's will, his Father's pleasure was so much more than just ending the pain.

He gives us new life, in new relationship, sharing in the victory of the cross.

Imagine if there been an answer to Eileen Keogh's illness and pain that also allowed her to live.

How do you think she and her daughter Kelly would have responded?

How would you respond if it were you?

I'm guessing that gratitude would barely cover it. It would probably be one of those moments when you literally have no words.

But even if Eileen Keogh ended up living a painfree life, she would still die one day.

We all will.

The big issue in the euthanasia debate is often about 'how people die'.

The bigger question is not so much how we'll die but who we are when we die.

When we know the God of Compassion as our only Saviour that we are more sinful than we want to admit but more loved than we can possibly imagine, our identity is complete in Christ.

When we consider the compassion of the cross, we can have no words other than praise and thanks.

Let's do just that in the words of:

Philippians 2: 9-11

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

