

**Christ's Sufferings
God's Hand and Counsel
Acts 4:28
Key # 3¹**

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In our first week of Lenten vespers, in order to contemplate the meaning of Christ's sufferings and death, we considered those sufferings as Christ's obedience unto death for the sake of the disobedient sinners. Romans 5:19 provided us with this first key to understanding Christ's sufferings:

KJV Romans 5:19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Last week, we considered the sufferings of Christ as a payment and sacrifice for the sins of the world. Isaiah 53:5-6 provided us with this second key to understanding Christ's sufferings:

KJV Isaiah 53:5 But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Now, we want to continue to contemplate the meaning of Christ's sufferings. The third key to understanding the sufferings of Christ is found in Acts 4:27-28 -

KJV Acts 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined

¹ The sermon below is based on material in Johann Gerhard's Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Malone: Repristination Press, 1999.

before to be done.

All that happened to Jesus at the hand of Pilate, Herod, Israel, and the gentiles, was determined beforehand by the hand and counsel of God. Therefore as we contemplate Christ's sufferings we should view everything that happened as if God himself had done it.

Where else in Scripture do we read of this? Several verses from Isaiah 53 apply:

KJV Isaiah 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

KJV Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Notice in v. 4 that Christ in his sufferings is esteemed "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted". Then in v. 10 we are told, "it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief". It also says that in doing this, God made "his soul an offering for sin".

There is one more text that is important for our discussion. The Holy Spirit said through the prophet Zechariah:

KJV Zechariah 13:7 Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man *that is* my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

The Lord of hosts is speaking of his determination to smite the shepherd (Messiah). Though this smiting scatters the sheep, it's ultimate issue is blessing and salvation. Jesus himself quoted this passage in the Garden of Gethsemane as a prophecy of his arrest, suffering and death, and of the disciples' forsaking him.

KJV Mark 14:27 And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. 28 But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.

So, we must view the sufferings of Christ as having happened according to the hand and counsel of God. But we should be careful here not to think of this as though God planted the murderous thoughts and plots in men's minds or compelled them to act wickedly. Scripture clearly teaches that God is not the cause of sin; he doesn't cause anyone to sin. Rather, God allowed Christ's enemies room to bring to completion the murderous plot which the devil inspired in the perpetrators, and which their own sin nurtured. God permitted this, not because he has pleasure in evil deeds, but because he knew how to direct this suffering of Christ to a blessed end - the redemption of the human race. God's hand and counsel did not force people to act against their will, but they did determine that what was done should be so.

That God the Lord would smite the Shepherd is meant to be comforting to us. God punished Christ on our account so that we would not be smitten and punished if we repent of our sins and by faith lay them on Christ. As it says in Isaiah 53 -

KJV Isaiah 53:5 But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

As we read through the accounts of Christ's sufferings, and behold him bound, beaten, and crucified, we are to view these things as though God himself did them. But why would the Father treat his beloved Son in this manner? Because in love for his Father, and in love for lost sinners, Christ wished to save us by taking all our sin upon himself in order to atone for it. Bearing our sin, he stepped before God's judgment in our stead, and God, in judgment and wrath dealt with him as though he were the greatest of sinners.

Thus, the sufferings of Christ, when viewed aright, clearly mirror God's wrath against sin. If our sins were small matters, as people today think, then why was it

necessary for the beloved Son of God to suffer and die? Sin is no light matter. It took the suffering and death of the sinless Son of God to atone for it. Nothing less will avail with God. Take note of Christ's anguish and bloody sweat in Gethsemane; it is the result of Christ's bearing up under the wrath of God for our sins so that we won't have to be crushed by them. Note also Christ's prayer to the Father:

KJV Luke 22:41 And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, 42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

What is this cup which Jesus refers to here? It is the cup of the wrath of God for sinners to drink in judgment. Note the following passages:

KJV Psalm 75:8 For in the hand of the LORD *there is* a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring *them* out, *and* drink *them*.

KJV Revelation 14:10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

When Jesus indicates his willingness to take the cup in accordance with the will and plan of God, he thereby shows his intention to bear our sins and the wrath of God, and pay for our sin with his suffering and death. He drank the cup of wrath that we would not have to.

Finally, take note of the darkness that descended over the land from the sixth through the ninth hour. This darkness was a wrathful darkness. As Jesus hung on the cross, bearing in his own body all the sins of the world, God the Father viewed him in a wrathful manner to the extent that Jesus cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He experienced the forsakenness of sinners that we might be assured that we would

never be forsaken.

Therefore, contemplating the sufferings of Christ in terms of them being the hand and counsel of God enables us to recognize several things:

1. The grievousness of our sin
2. The horror of God's wrath because of our sin
3. The wonder of the love of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, in order to save us to the uttermost, endured such wrath in our stead. He is our peace.