Isaiah 53:6 Our Biggest Problem **(Slide #1 Straying Sheep)**

Paul David Tripp, in his devotional, New Morning Mercies, writes, “It is the big delusion, the height of arrogance, the seductive trap, the big, dark danger. It leads nowhere good. It’s destiny is death. It sat at the center of the disaster in the garden. It propelled the sad rebellion of Adam and Eve. ...Sin turns all of us into citizens of the night. Sin causes all of us to be committed to low-light living. We hide, we deny, we cover, we lie, we excuse, we shift the blame, we rationalize, we defend, and we explain away… It tempts us all again and again in situation after situation, location after location, relationship after relationship. We fall into thinking what multitudes of our lost forefathers thought. We buy into this one fateful thought, that perhaps we’re smarter than God, that maybe our way is better than His way. Only grace can deliver the de-luded from the danger that they are to themselves.” (February 13 devotion, February 14 devotion)

We are in our third week of our 53 sermon series. We began by seeing how Isaiah 53 is like the Bible in miniature. It is one of the best explanations of the gospel in the Old Testament. Last week, we looked at how the Messiah would be misunderstood. The people were looking for a warrior king to give them political standing and safety from enemies. But, God was looking at delivering His people from an even bigger danger. Today, we are going to see that our biggest problem is not suffering or improving our status, but sin.

Sin comes with consequences. For example, if I get caught stealing, I have to return the item and pay a fine or go to jail. And sin is our biggest problem not just because of the natural consequences that come from it but because of a bigger reality. God is holy. That means that He is perfect and set apart. He is unique in His goodness. He is so perfect that He can not be in the presence of anything that is not good. So, when I sin, I am separated from God. I don’t get to experience the joy, peace, and love that He offers. If something isn’t done with my sin problem, then I can never be in God’s presence. And if it is not fixed before I die, then I spend eternity separated from God. That is what makes Hell so awful -- not the flames, the endless thirst, or the fact of being surrounded by other sinners. No, what makes Hell so awful is that God is not there.

This is difficult news for us to hear. But, for us to fully grasp everything that Jesus endured on the cross and struggled with before being resurrected again, we have to understand that we are sinners. The bigger our understanding of our fallen condition, the more in awe we will be of God’s grace. To fully celebrate Easter, we need to first contemplate Lent. To appreciate the good, we have to understand the bad that came before.

Our text for today is just one verse. **(Slide # 2: Isaiah 53:6)** Isaiah 53:6 says, “We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Even though our passage is only one verse, there is a lot packed into it. Today, we are going to look at how sin is disobedience, how sin is universal, and how sin is personal.

**(Slide # 3) First, sin is disobedience.**

Since nearly the beginning of the human race, people have been in rebellion against God and His plan to redeem people back to Himself. Sin is any failure to obey God in attitude, behavior, or nature. And whether you call it sin, iniquity, transgression, immorality, offenses, shortcomings, wickedness, or just plain evil, sin is our biggest problem. Health, finances, relationships, emotions,... nothing can hold a candle to the problem of sin.

God created us and loves us. Because He is merciful, He does not want us to be enslaved to sin. So, the Lord gave the Ten Commandments as guidelines to how He expects us to live. Our holy God showed what was right and good not as a way to control us, but as a source of protection and grace. And just as a reminder, the Ten Commandments are

**(Slide # 4 & 5: Ten Commandments)**

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make idols.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

The Ten Commandments show how sin can be both individual acts like stealing, lying, or committing murder, and also the state of our mind, our attitudes, in sins like having no other gods before God, honoring your parents, and coveting.

Wayne Grudem, author of Systematic Theology, writes, “... [The Ten Commandments] emphasize the seriousness of sin. We realize from experience that sin is harmful to our lives, that it brings pain and destructive consequences to us and to others affected by it. But to define sin as failure to conform to the moral law of God, is to say that sin is more than simply painful and destructive -- it is also wrong in the deepest sense of the word. **(Slide # 6 containing just the part in italics)** *In a universe created by God, sin ought not to be approved. Sin is directly opposite to all that is good in the character of God and just as God necessarily and eternally delights in himself and all that he is, so God necessarily and eternally hates sin.* It is, in essence, the contradiction of the excellence of his moral character… Although God’s punishment of sin does serve as a *deterrent* against further sinning and as a *warning* to those who observe it, this is not the primary reason why God punishes sin. The primary reason [that God punishes sin] is that *God’s righteousness demands it*, so that he might be glorified in the universe that he has created. He is the Lord.” (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 492, 509)

Isaiah described sin with these telling phrases; we have “gone astray”... “each of us has turned to our own way.” (**Slide # 7: Sin is disobedience. Isaiah 53:6, highlighting Gone astray… each of us has turned to our own way.)**

We have turned off the right path. Like stupid sheep we either follow a leader who ushers us onto the road of destruction or maybe even worse yet, we try to become the Head Sheep and dive headlong into disaster. We have ignored the voice of our Good Shepherd and have wanted to call the shots.

The few times people might allow themselves to think about sin, they think of the outward and visible signs of sin -- things like gossip, slander, hatred, murder, pride, bitterness, envy, drunkenness, immorality, adultery. People are more apt to reflect on the harmful nature of sin when they have been sinned against. It is much harder to dwell on the seriousness of sin when we consider how we have sinned against God and others. But, either way, our most basic problem is sin itself. Refusing to acknowledge God and submitting to His lordship in our life gets us in all sorts of trouble. Sin is hostility to God, rebellion against Him. It is defiance, arrogance, and a desire to be equal with God.

Theologian Cornelius Plantinga describes it like this: “Sin is deviant and perverse, an injustice or iniquity or ingratitude. Sin is disorder and disobedience. Sin is faithlessness, lawlessness, godlessness. Sin is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it – both transgression and shortcoming. Sin is a missing of the mark, a spoiling of goods, a staining of garments, a hitch in one’s gait, a fragmenting of the whole.” <http://rcnzonline.com/pukekohe/SermonUploads/written/John_Haverland.Like_Sheep.BC_Article_15.Isaiah_53_6.pdf>

Sin is disobedience to God.

**Second, sin is universal. (Slide # 8)**

Universal. Every person. The whole world -- all of us have done this.

Take a minute and consider that. Right now, there are over 7.8 billion people that are living on planet Earth. That is a big number. It looks like this: (**Slide # 9 7.8 billion written out 7,800,000,000 people )**

According to the Population Reference Bureau, “... more than 108 billion members of our species have ever been born… Given the current population of 7.8 billion, that means those of us currently alive represent about 7 percent of the total number of humans who have ever lived. And, the Population Reference Bureau estimates that by 2050 about 113 billion will have lived on Earth.” <https://www.prb.org/howmanypeoplehaveeverlivedonearth/>

I don’t know about you, but that is kind of mind-boggling to me -- to think that so far over 108 billion people have been alive since the beginning of time. Even though the world is crowded right now and 7.8 billion people is A LOT of people, we only comprise 7% of the total number who have ever lived. It is hard to grasp how big that is.

What is even harder to swallow is that all 108 billion people so far and all of those yet to come are sinners.

**Slide # 10: Sin is universal. Isaiah 53:6, highlighting “We *ALL* like sheep have gone astray”)** Sin is universal. Isaiah 53:6 says, “We all like sheep have gone astray…” We all wander off the path.

An even bigger thought than all of this is that even though we can not carry the burden of our own sin, Jesus came and “the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us ALL.” Jesus came and carried every sin that has ever been committed or ever will be committed. When I think of how much I sin and then I multiply that times 108 billion people, the amount is overwhelming. It is no wonder that Isaiah says in Isaiah 53:5 that “he was crushed by our iniquities.” **(Slide # 11 Isaiah 53:6 highlighting “of us all)**

All of OUR sin became ALL of HIS punishment. Not only do we ALL sin. Jesus took the consequences for ALL that sin. ALL of it, not a portion, not even half… ALL. And He Himself had not committed one sin ...ever. We know what sin feels like. What it does to our soul. Jesus had seen what sin could do to people. Now, our perfect, sinless Son of God experienced what sin felt like.

So, how do we do it? How do we sin?

Sometimes, a sheep does not intentionally go astray. It nibbles itself astray. It puts its head down to the grass, and begins to eat, and eat, and eat, and at last looking up, finds it has wandered far from the flock, and is lost. It was so absorbed in feeding, that it paid no heed to where it is at. People, just like sheep, become thoughtlessly absorbed in something or other, and never stop to look around to see what direction they are going. We get our heads down focusing on our jobs, making money, providing for our families, seeking that next shiny thing...

It absorbs all our energies and all our thoughts, and almost unconsciously we wander far from the shepherd into moral and spiritual ruin. We become fascinated with things that look like treasure, but actually lead to problems and we forget to treasure the things of God.

Can you relate to this? Have you ever been going along and then suddenly realize that your life has gotten really complicated and things have been set in motion that you did not expect? Have you been caught up in temptation or busy-ness or then one day woke up to a reality that is not one that you would wish on anyone? Sin can blind us to what is good. And because it is a universal problem, we often do not see sin, until the consequences shake us to the truth.

**(Slide # 12) Third, sin is personal.**

We talked about how we may un-intenionally sin, but sometimes -- let’s be honest, maybe more often than not--, we are intentional and purposeful in going astray. Sometimes we run hell-bent towards something that we know isn’t good, but we do it anyway because we want to. We want to be large and in charge.

**(Slide # 13: Psalm 53:3)** Psalm 53:3 says, “Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.” This sin goes back to the Garden of Eden. God created Adam and Eve in his image. He called His creation good and gave them the ability to obey God’s will. Everything was permissible for them, except eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They chose to “go astray”, to “turn to their own way”. And that sin has left a stain on every human since then. That choice became part of human nature. It is ingrained in us. Adam and Eve’s choice became our choice. Their sin became our sin. We are sinners by nature. Sin isn’t something we discovered by imitation. It has infected everyone in the world.

**(Slide #14: Third, sin is personal. Isaiah 53:6 highlighting “each of us” )**

Sin is personal.

"...each of us has turned to his own way." This is not how most people see themselves. Most people have a pretty positive assessment of how good they are. If they believe in heaven they give themselves a good chance of getting there. That is because they have a generous view of God's love, which is good, and a VERY generous view of themselves, which may be more generous than accurate. “After all,” someone might say, “most of the time I am a decent sort of a person and generally law-abiding. Yes, I occasionally drink a bit much and, yes, my first marriage didn't go too well, and no, I don't declare all my income to the IRS; but looking at the big picture, and comparing myself to others who are much worse than me, I am doing okay! Besides, I haven’t killed anyone.

But the assessment of the Bible is more sober and more accurate: sin is personal;

"...EACH of us has turned to our own way." Sin has infected every person in the world. Everything we said earlier about the disobedience of all of humanity is true of every person in the world, you and me included. Perhaps you are beginning to see why the word "sin" has dropped out of people's vocabulary, why so few books are written about this subject, perhaps even why so few sermons are preached about sin; it is hard to swallow, it is unpopular; it is not the "feel-good" message we would like to hear; it does not seem very up-beat; it doesn't lift your self-esteem or polish your self-image.

Sin does not just show itself in our actions or our attitudes, but it is also a part of who we are. Down to the core of who we are as individuals, we are sinful. Even while asleep, an unbeliever not committing any action or attitude is still a “sinner” in God’s sight. They have a nature or character quality that does not conform to God’s law.

In Reformed theology, this idea is defined as total depravity. Total depravity does not mean utter depravity. It does not mean that I am as bad as I can possibly be. It does not mean that each person is going to end up being a serial murderer or evil dictator. What it IS saying, though, is that even though all people are not as bad as they can possibly be, what happened with the Original Sin in the Garden of Eden affects our whole being. Sin affects our bodies. That is why we become sick and die. Sin affects our minds and our thinking. We can still think, but we are limited in our capacity to understand. Our will, the driving force behind whether we will choose right or wrong is now in bondage. Our natural inclination is to choose the quick, the easy, the feel-good over what is right and good. Sin holds a power over us. Even when we try to do what is right, the sin in our nature has to fight against pride over doing the right thing.

R.C. Sproul, Reformed theologian, has written, “ I like to replace the term *total depravity* with my favorite designation, which is *radical corruption*. Ironically, the word *radical* has its roots in the Latin word for “root,” which is *radix*, and it can be translated *root* or *core*. The term *radical* has to do with something that permeates to the core of a thing. It’s not something that is tangential or superficial, lying on the surface. The Reformed view is that the effects of the fall extend or penetrate to the core of our being. Even the English word *core* actually comes from the Latin word *cor*, which means “heart.” That is, our sin is something that comes from our hearts. In biblical terms for **each** one of us, that means it’s from the core or very center of our existence.”

<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-total-depravity/>

We can’t point fingers at others and say, “Yeah, look at them. They are terrible.” We need to individually point fingers to ourselves and admit on a very deep and personal level, that this is true for me.  **Each** one of us is called to see the deep need we each have for a Savior.

So what is required for us to be conformed to the image of Christ is not simply some small adjustments or behavioural modifications, but nothing less than renovation from the inside. We need to be regenerated, to be made over again, by the power of the Spirit. The only way a person can escape this radical situation is by the Holy Spirit’s changing the core, the heart. However, even that change does not instantly vanquish sin. The complete elimination of sin will not be done until we are in Heaven with Jesus.

And yet, it is still something that we need to deal with. We have to acknowledge it. Then, we have to humble ourselves and admit that we can not rid ourselves of it. We need to confess our need for a savior to deliver us from the power of sin.

I am not going to go into too much detail, because Russell will be talking more about this in upcoming sermons, but, Sin and Death do not have the final say. **(Slide # 15: Isaiah 53:6, highlighting “and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquities of us all)**

Look at the end of Isaiah 53:6. “...and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquities of us all.” Our Heavenly Father sent Jesus as an atoning sacrifice to take the punishment our sin required. God’s holiness is great, but so is His love and grace. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, made a way that we can be in right relationship with God. All he calls us to do is to repent of our sin and put our faith in Him.

So, today, when you are driving home or when you are sitting down for lunch, or when you are in bed tonight, take some time and think about what sin has done to the world. Think about the ways you have been sinned against. Then, ask God to give you the courage to be vulnerable with Him and honest about the sins that you have committed. Confess those sins and trust in His goodness and faithfulness to forgive you of those sins. Then, look to His grace to guide you in this coming week to live a life that is more pleasing to Him. Not as a way to earn our salvation, but in gratitude for all that He is and all that He has done for us. Repentance is not easy work, but by it we can find freedom and joy. Being honest about who we are and what we have done or left undone isn’t simple, but there is hope in the name of Jesus.

Let us go to our Gracious God in prayer now.

Almighty and most merciful Father,

We have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is nothing good in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Spare those who confess their faults. Restore those who repent. Help us to live a God honoring life to the glory of Jesus’ name. Amen.

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Benediction:

Hope Church, hear these words from the book of [Jude](http://www.christianity.com/bible/bible.php?ver=niv&q=jude+24)  “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” ([Jude 24-25](http://www.christianity.com/bible/bible.php?ver=niv&q=jude+24)) Even so, Marantha, Come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen.