

# A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth

Lutheran Service Book 438 | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

## Introduction

Martin Luther declared that Isaiah 53 “is the foremost passage on the suffering and resurrection of Christ, and there is hardly another like it” (AE 17:215). The cross of Jesus is the complete exposure of human sin, our sin, in Christ’s own flesh. As often as we may successfully hide our sin from others and from ourselves, there is no hiding at the cross. We are exposed.

Yet when we see the cross of Jesus for what it truly is, we no longer shy away from the truth about our sin. There is no longer any gain to hiding it. “With his wounds we are healed” (Is. 53:5). No longer must we hide in fear from the accusations of God’s Law. These accusations no longer bring

God’s wrathful judgment upon us. Instead, at the cross, God’s wrath and just judgment are fully met in Jesus Christ for us.

- Is it easy or difficult to think about your own sin? Why or why not?
- What do you think: Is it the seriousness of your own sin that teaches you the grateful joy for Christ’s crucifixion, or is it the cross of Jesus that teaches you the dreadful seriousness of your own sin?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Read Is. 53:1–3. Christians since the first days of the Church have interpreted the Suffering Servant in this passage to be Jesus.

- Give examples of how the descriptions in these verses fit the description of Jesus.
- If Jesus had “no beauty that we should desire him,” what sort of beauty does He embody that we can sing of Him with words such as “Beautiful Savior”?

Read Is. 53:4–6. These verses get to the heart of the chapter.

- What is the purpose of Jesus’ suffering and death?
- Who lays this suffering and death on Him? What does this tell us about the crucifixion of Jesus?
- Notice the use of the pronouns “we,” “our” and “us.” Who is also included with those pronouns?

- The substitutionary nature of Jesus’ death is clearly portrayed in this text, especially in verse 5. What is the great comfort for us in these words? Do the words create discomfort in us? Why or why not?

Read Is. 53:10–12. The mood of the passage changes here.

- What phrases in these verses point to the resurrection of Jesus?
- The benefits in the completion of this sacrifice are directed toward the one who suffers, namely, Jesus. If Jesus has taken what is ours (namely, our sin), how does He give us what is His?
- Philipp Melanchthon wrote, “To know Christ is to know His benefits” (*Loci Communes*). What are the benefits that come to us by Jesus’ death? Are these benefits described in these verses?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Reading any biography of Paul Gerhardt (1607–76) quickly reveals that this Lutheran pastor and hymn writer was a “suffering servant” of the Lord. His father died while he was a boy. During his time of studies at the University of Wittenberg, the Thirty Years’ War raged around him. He suffered at the hands of the governing authorities in his work in the Holy Ministry because of his faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions. His wife and all but one of his children died before him.

Still, even at age 70, this “theologian sifted in Satan’s sieve,” as a portrait epitaph reads, could write about the joy that was his in serving his Lord.

- From what you know of the Gospel of Christ, what is the source of Gerhardt’s joy?
- Luther wrote, “[The Gospel] teaches us, not how to get rid of evil and to enjoy peace but how to live with it and yet conquer it.” What does he mean?

## Text

Stanza 1 captures the silence and the innocence with which Jesus goes to His sacrificial death. The Gospels also record Jesus' silence in the face of His accusers and tormenters.

- What is the significance of this silence? Does divine silence imply judgment? Why or why not?

The stanza ends with the words "All this I gladly suffer."

- How is this response of joy revealed in Jesus' own words and actions?
- How does this phrase express Gerhardt's own view of his call to suffer for the sake of Christ?
- How about you?

Stanza 1 also alludes to the Passover, to the sacrificial lamb without blemish. Read Ex. 12:5. As the Lamb of God (John 1:29), Jesus embodies all the sacrifices of ancient Israel.

- What words does the hymn text use to emphasize the singularity of Jesus' self-offering?

Stanzas 2 and 3 focus on the relation between the divine Father and Son. Yet, the hymn text language also reaches out to include others.

## Making the Connection

Indeed, what Jesus did for us on the cross is beyond comprehension. His resurrection surpasses the ability of our finite minds to grasp it. What is more, it all happened so long ago, so how can we know for sure?

St. Paul wrote, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

St. Paul also wrote, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that

- Find phrases in these two stanzas that draw us in as the blessed recipients of Christ's sacrificial death.
- Gerhardt writes, "O wondrous Love, what have You done!" and "O Love, how strong You are to save!" How does Jesus' crucifixion define love in a profound way?

With the final stanza, the hymn text gives voice to the believer's joy in sharing all the benefits of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and His glorious resurrection.

- Find as many of these benefits as you can in the text of this final stanza.
- What is the ultimate hope expressed by the words "Lord, when Your glory I shall see / And taste Your kingdom's pleasure"?
- Is this hope only in heaven? Where may we see "glory" and taste "pleasure" even now in suffering?

Martin Luther wrote about a "joyous exchange" for the Christian because of what Jesus Christ has done. As in a marriage, the property of the one becomes the property of the other, and the property of both together. In this, there is great joy.

- What evidence of Luther's "joyous exchange" can you find in the text of this final stanza?

we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16).

- What does it mean that Christ's work on the cross is given to us in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper?
- Where, then, can you know the joy of Christ's glory in cross and resurrection to be your own in the midst of "crosses"?

## In Closing

"Your blood my royal robe shall be ... Your righteousness shall be my crown; / With these I need not hide me" (st. 4). The events of Holy Week reveal that there is no need for us to hide, for we are no longer naked in our sin. We are clothed in the finest possible apparel to celebrate the feast of Easter, both now and forever.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 438.

## Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience, and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Sunday of the Passion).