

Text: Isaiah 53:10-12

Theme: "Father, Please Crush Me!"

"Christian love draws no distinction between one enemy and another, except that the more bitter our enemy's hatred, the greater their need of love...Our enemies have nothing to expect from a follower of Jesus, but unqualified love." Who do you think that quote came from? Do you think it came from someone who never faced the intensity of suffering? Is your guess that it came from a Christian who never faced pain as you and I have? The Christian who said this knew the inside of the highest security prison in Nazi Germany. This Christian lived and breathed and suffered in a concentration camp. This Christian was executed for his stand, but even as he walked to the gallows, he did so in such a way, that a witness commented, "I have never seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God." Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor during the Nazi regime. If anyone had a right to say that serving God and others to the point of suffering isn't worth it, it would be him. But he never said such a thing, instead, he looked at the Christian life of servanthood and said, "To endure the cross is not tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ." This is so counter-self, and counter-cultural. The thought that God's will for you and me could be, will be, suffering as we serve him. How radical an idea that instead of avoiding suffering or even the mere sight of it, that our Father wants us to embrace suffering. Could it really be our prayer as Christians to say, "Father, please crush me?"

What thoughts sprinted into your mind when you heard the prophet Isaiah preach to us that **"it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer?"** How can it be loving for our Father to send his only Son into the crosshairs of the most violent and abusive suffering any human being has ever endured? How could God will his Son to live a life of constant temptation, of loneliness, of death? Is it any wonder why the disciples in our Gospel instantly change the topic of Jesus' suffering and death? Who, in their right mind, seeks to suffer? Who, thinking clearly, would choose to serve someone who intends to hurt them or has inflicted them with the deepest of wounds?

Have you ever noticed how we try to avoid even thinking about suffering? Has it ever hit you how putting others first who haven't shown us even the tiniest drops of love is often the most distant thought? You and I, as human beings, don't even want to *think* about suffering, let alone seek it. We may slow down to view the carnage of a car crash, but the second we can accelerate and remove our eyes from it, we're gone as fast as we can. You and I when presented with the chance to serve someone with the grace of our Father, the love of his Son, the joy of the Spirit, if that someone has hurt us in any way, how right it feels to refuse them that gift. Think of all the ways we choose to be served, instead of to serve? The disciples didn't want to think of the cost of discipleship, they distracted themselves with desires for ambition and power, but that's never been how our God operates. He has in mind for his people to be **"servants"** and **"slaves of all."** He commands us to walk in the ways of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, Jesus himself, and not hide from suffering but rather to seek it. To live the life motto: "Lord, please crush me!"

How can this be? How can the God who is love itself desire for you and me to live in the city of suffering, to not avoid the burning buildings of people's lives but to sprint straight into them? How can our Father plan for his children, you and me, a life not defined by care-free-ness, but of constant cross-bearing-ness? Do you see the devil writing the script of temptation? The world screams at us to cocoon away from the pain, abuse, and trial of life. When the prospect of suffering presents itself, our gut turns and we want to avoid it at all costs. Serving to the point of considering every person, even the most vile criminal, deserving of our unconditional love doesn't make any sense. How could a loving God not just allow suffering as we serve him, but *will* for suffering to happen to us? How can this be? How much easier it is to distract ourselves with Netflix-binging, and conversation-avoiding, rather than running headfirst into the tragedies being lived and relived in the hearts of so many people around us?

What is the purpose of suffering? The Suffering Servant would love to teach you. It's true that it was our Father's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, but the suffering wasn't the end goal. His suffering was a "**guilt offering.**" Once that offering was made, "**he saw the light of life and was satisfied.**" Why? Because "**he justified many, declared many not guilty, and he bore all our sins.**" Our Father had a conversation with our Brother Jesus, and they knew exactly what it would cost to save their most loved creation. It would take the church to reject their God. It would take a world power to abuse and kill God. It would take isolation, mental, emotional, and physical trauma, and unjust execution. It would take experiencing hell itself, but it was worth it...for you. Jesus chose you, he submitted to his Father's will, he embraced the cross-bearing life of servanthood...for you. He who had every right to demand service, to demand fame, to demand authority, set it aside...for you. He who once lived in eternal happiness chose to turn his eyes toward your suffering. Your Jesus who knew that entering a dark world, a world who would hate him, despise him, and reject him would lead to pain. He entered with a determination that can only be explained by a love for you that is boundless. A love that is intentional. A love that embraces your suffering, and accompanies you no matter where you go.

It's only by seeing the heart of Jesus who longed for nothing more than to step into the garbage heap that life often is, filled with the rotting effects of sin, that opens our eyes to the suffering within us and outside of us. We all have experienced unexplainable pain, and often we never discover the purpose for it. That's the grace of Jesus through it all: He has a purpose beyond our wildest imagination. The purpose of suffering is simply to strengthen our grip of Christ, to turn our eyes away from the fading nature of this world, to see the prosperity that waits in the world we are meant for. Our suffering is designed by our Father to open our eyes to see Jesus step by step, embracing your and my pain so we could see that he has total solidarity with us, that he identifies with us even though we can all say with Paul, "**I am the worst of sinners.**" We can say with Jesus, "Lord, please crush me." Crush me and my ego, crush my aversion to the suffering all around me, crush me when I look anywhere else for purpose and hope, crush me so that I see the beauty and the power of the cross." The cross that to the world is death and end, but to you and me the cross of Jesus is life and merely the beginning!

Because you know the Suffering Savior, the Servant of servants, "**saw the light of life**" again! God the Father through the resurrection on that first Easter exalted him, and "**gave him a**

portion among the great!" **"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds, we are healed."** The Victorious Servant, Jesus, even being exalted in every way, continues to serve you. Look at what Isaiah tells us, **"he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors."** Because Jesus chose to suffer with us, because he chose to serve us, because he chose to count himself as one of us, he now serves us with the spoils of his victory! What are those spoils? Forgiveness of every single sin, life fulfilling, because we know the meaning to life, painted in the brown hues of the cross, salvation, because he now **"makes intercession"** for us. Jesus considers you to be **"the strong."** But this strength that defines you is far different than what the world says is strength. Your strength was given you by suffering, by serving. This strength, this grace, empowers you to make yourself, as Paul says, **"a slave to everyone."**

Because the Lord has crushed you so that you could look to him, and see the strength, restoration, and hope that he only he can give, you join in Paul's song to **"become all things to all people so that by all possible means (you) might save some."** The Lord has crushed the sinful nature, and he will continue to do so so that you know and rejoice in your identity of being a slave to Christ and a slave to every human being. By faith, you no longer run away from trauma and pain, but you seek solidarity with those around you. You enter into homes of tears and regrets so that you can bring the gospel of the Suffering Servant, Jesus, which alone restores and makes new. You choose to sit beside the dying, to listen to the heartbreak, to cry with the broken-hearted, because you know that this world is consumed by suffering, and there is no greater honor than to suffer in service to Jesus. You can say with Paul, "Lord crush me, so everyone I meet can see you and not me." Lord, crush me, use a restored sinner like me **"to win the weak."** Lord, crush me, make me who you need me to be so that I have the greatest honor of sharing the cause for the gospel. Lord, crush me so that when you exalt me one day in the place I am meant for, I will laugh with joy as I see how my suffering brought that one soul into your presence forever. Lord, crush me, that I can see the smile of a person I sat with, a person who thought God could never love them, now standing in the presence of Jesus, where no suffering can even come close to approaching.

That's the joy Dietrich Bonhoeffer is experiencing right now. The Nazi soldiers, hardened to tragedy, had hearts transformed by the humble service, the suffering under the cross of a Christian who knew and clung to the grace of God in everything. The people of concentration camps who were beyond a state of hopelessness, hearing a Christian, suffering under the same circumstances but proclaiming a hope that not even the darkest forces could snuff out. My dear family, my brothers, and sisters, as illogical as it sounds, rejoice when the Lord crushes you. Rejoice because you know that no suffering happens without a purpose. Rejoice that you can serve and bear your personal, unique wood of the cross. Rejoice that you have been called to win the weak, to become all things, to serve all people, because you have the greatest calling. Even if for all your toiling, just one person enters heaven, could there be anything more worth it? Lord, crush us, and everything that hinders our sightline on you. Throw us into your arms every day, remind us that the cost of following you couldn't be more worth it. Make us servants like

you, make us free to serve, let us see your light, and look forward to your embrace, a place where suffering will never be invited. Amen.