

Explore the Bible: November 15

God Justifies • Isaiah 53:1-12

By Don Hicks



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I have an early memory of my cousin feeding a baby lamb from a bottle with a nipple on it. This is basically my only first-hand encounter with sheep. Margel let me feed his lamb. The joy of feeding the lamb is the main reason this involvement is such a clear and a positive memory for me. As long as we were in or even around the pen, the little lamb wanted to be close and nuzzle. That lamb was very much a pet, a very dependent pet.

When I was a bivocational pastor and taught in a rural high school, many of my students raised and showed lambs. Those students and their show lambs were very close to each other as well. Jesus tells us in the New Testament: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27 KJV). Verse 26 tells us that those who do not believe in Jesus are not His sheep, but it doesn't say they are not sheep.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah used sheep to explain a very important part of God's eternal plan for our justification and salvation. Isaiah 53:6 (CSB) begins: "We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way." This the same teaching as the Apostle Paul presented in the New Testament:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 CSB). Any honest person will admit this is true that, “we all have turned our own way,” and therefore, “fall short of the glory of God.”

So we now need to go back and look at all of Isaiah 53:6 (CSB). “We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all.” This brings us to the very deepest meaning of the doctrine of “justification.” This doctrine was where the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day failed to accept Jesus as Messiah. They wanted a Messiah who would be a conquering military leader, defeating the Roman occupiers of Judea.

Even though they had Isaiah’s prophecy for hundreds of years, they didn’t have the slightest idea what he meant when he had written about the Messiah being punished for the sins of us all. They just couldn’t accept that Jesus Christ would be, “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3 KJV).

The Sanhedrin, Pharisees, and Sadducees certainly didn’t accept the prophecy, “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” (Isaiah 53:6 KJV). Jesus was beaten with many stripes the night before He was crucified and died that we might be healed. He has paid for our transgressions.

Remember in verse six we are told, “the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all.” This is the doctrine of Justification. Jesus paid the price for our sin when He died for us, but we must also remember Jesus is alive and risen from the grave so He can give us the gifts of salvation and eternal life. Isaiah gave us some specific signs we can see to confirm the reality of his prophecy. Verse seven (CSB) says,

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth.”

Mark tells us in his Gospel that Isaiah’s prophecy was exactly right: “Yet their testimony [against Jesus] did not agree even on this. Then the high priest stood up before them all and questioned Jesus, ‘Don’t you have an answer to what these men are testifying against you?’ But he kept silent and did not answer” (Mark 14:59-61a CSB).

Isaiah tells us: “The LORD’s pleasure will be accomplished. After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, and he will carry their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:10-11 CSB).

God’s pleasure is that you will be justified. “Since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:12-13 CSB).

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