

Advent Reading for Thursday, December 21, 2017 ***“Crucified between Two Criminals” (Isaiah 53:12)***

As we continue to examine Isaiah 53, the prophet provides some interesting details on how Christ was crucified, along with an intriguing insight into where He was temporarily buried before rising from the dead three days later.

We begin with Isaiah’s words about our Lord’s crucifixion: *“He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors”* (53:12). In the phrase, *“He was numbered with the transgressors”*, Isaiah was foretelling how *the Servant* would carry out His mission among those for whom He died - sinful human beings. Interestingly, Jesus Himself quotes this verse a few hours before going to the cross: *“For I tell you that this which was written must be fulfilled in Me, ‘AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS’; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment”* (Luke 22:37). Luke later records the actual fulfillment: *“Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right, and the other on the left”* (Luke 23:32-33). We also know from Luke, and from Matthew and Mark, that both criminals were initially mocking Christ. But as the hours wore on, one of the criminals had a change of heart. Recognizing Jesus was innocent, He cried out for mercy. Jesus graciously granted his request, giving him one of the clearest assurances of salvation found anywhere in the Bible: *“Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43). The other criminal died in his sins as we all will do, unless we too cry out to our Lord for mercy.

In other words, their completely incorrect view was that Jesus went through such horrific suffering and endured His appalling death on the cross because of His own sin. How wrong they were! As Isaiah makes clear, everything Jesus went through was for us and because of us! *It was our griefs that He bore, our sorrows that He carried; He was pierced through for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities; His chastening was for our well-being, and it was through His scourging that we are healed.*

Isaiah also foretold how the Messiah “*interceded for the transgressors*”. After writing that Jesus was crucified between two criminals, Luke records His intercession: “*Jesus was saying, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing’*” (Luke 23:34). And this was His prayer while on the cross!

Significantly, in this amazing 53rd chapter, Isaiah also reveals an important fact about our Lord’s burial: “*His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich in his death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit found in His mouth* (53:9). Having died a disgraceful death, the Jews intended for Jesus to have a shameful burial as well. His Father, however, had other plans. Jesus was *with a rich man in His death* thanks to Joseph of Arimathea. “*After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that He might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away the body of Jesus*” (John 19:38). Thankfully, the tomb of this rich man would not be needed for long, for our Lord would rise from the grave three days later. But it was Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin and, up to this point, a secret disciple, who came forth to offer his tomb, and in so doing fulfilled another of Isaiah’s captivating prophecies of the Messiah.

In terms of application, we are reminded again of the purpose of the Incarnation, as Isaiah indicates: “*He poured Himself out to death*”, and He did it for helpless sinners like us.

Giving Thanks – Thank You for *being numbered with us, the transgressors*, even though You never sinned! And thank You for bearing our sins and the penalty for them on the cross!