

Isaiah **53:1-5**

Who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

3

He is 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 did not esteem Him.

4

Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.

5

But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.

Before we came to Christ Church, we attended a big evangelical church not five minutes from our house. When I was very young (about four or five), my brother Jamie led me through the sinner's prayer, which I would later repeat at times when I had any doubts of my salvation, as if there were magic in those words which would somehow suddenly make me a child of the King. But this magic formula would not make me right with God. Thinking I was okay with God, however, I was baptized at seven, mainly because that's what my friends were doing and partly because I thought it was the right thing to do. I lived in the Bible belt, I knew what was expected of me, and I wanted to please my parents and those around me. But all of it was utterly and completely empty. I was a pretty good, decently behaved kind of girl outside of the home. At home with my family, however, I was the rebellious middle child who was constantly aching for attention, which isn't easy to obtain in a big family like mine. Even at a young age, I desperately wanted to possess the good opinion of others. Yet I did not care about the good opinion of the God of all the universe nor did I find any significance in the sacrificial death of Christ (I didn't think of it as anything but a sweet story). I had no plans to stop living solely for myself.

I was about nine years old when we first came to Christ Church. I left my friends, Sunday school class, church activities, and the only church I had ever known. I came kicking and screaming to this odd, moldy building with long sermons and ancient hymns. Soon enough, however, I realized there was good food to eat and hide-and-seek to play after services and was fairly consoled.

I went on living this way, without thinking twice about the state of my soul. I filled up on friends, events, and activities, while finding self-satisfaction in being a good kid and student. What I really thought of myself was clearly portrayed in the contents of a notebook of mine. One Sunday, I left this notebook at church when Pastor John and Mr. Scott Duley picked it up. On

every other page was written "Courtney Crampton is a star." Needless to say, it didn't take them very long to figure out who it belonged to.

Several years passed and I watched as Katie and Jamie were drastically converted and baptized. At home, I saw their lives completely transformed. They were truly new creations, and I knew it. I knew that they had something that I didn't have, and I wanted it -- just not yet. If I became a Christian and turned my life upside down to follow Christ, I knew that I would lose my best friends. In order to keep on living for myself, I made excuses. I told myself, 'They're older than you. You still have time to enjoy yourself.' Besides, the cost was just too high at the moment. I didn't want to give up everything -- not yet.

I went on carelessly in this way until Mrs. Misty taught a girls' summer bible study in 2007 when I was about 12 years old. We read through Joseph Alleine's book, *A Sure Guide to Heaven* and every week, one of the women in the church would share her testimony in our class. I learned for the first time what a true believer and what an unbeliever look like. I could no longer deny that I fell into the second category. I had seen the picture of the Christian - I didn't look like that. It was written in black and white: Satan was my master and God Himself was against me. If God really was the way He said He was - sovereign, mighty, omniscient, eternal, and holy - how could I ever face Him? I knew that I was living in sin. I was not a Christian.

I was scared and confused and unhappy. I didn't know what to do. But if God was holy, then I had to make myself good enough for God. As silly and ridiculous as that sounds, it made perfect sense to my proud heart. I started to read my bible, pray, listen, and take notes in church, none of which I had done before. I even began to read religious books (which was a big thing for me, as I was by no means a "reader" at the time). I lived this way for a while, and for a short

time, I felt better until I realized I was just as miserable than before. At that time, I had religion, but not God.

Every Sunday for a long time, I would tell myself, 'Next Sunday will be better. I'll be better. And Sunday after Sunday, I continued to live for myself and was no better. On several occasions, Jamie would speak to me of Christ and His many kindnesses. I dreaded these conversations because I had nothing to contribute. I did not know the Christ he spoke of so fondly. I was miserable and angry, but I couldn't bear to let anyone think I didn't have it all together. The good opinion of others and my "nice Crampton girl" reputation was my heart's idol.

It was around this time that I remember Mrs. Heather Duley approached me one Wednesday night and asked if I would be willing to give my testimony at a XC camp. I had no choice but to tell her that I did not know God. My pride was hurt more than anything - but God used even that to drive me to Himself.

I remember vividly one night after reading my bible, just lying on my bed and weeping. I could not pretend anymore. I did not know the God of the bible. I was miserable. All the "good things" I had done were all for me, so that I could feel a little bit better about myself. I realized I wasn't even very good at being good. All my religion was as filthy as my sins - they *were* sins and ultimately, *I* was sin. I could not escape it.

I don't know how long I went on in this hopeless state, but praise God it was not forever! God, in His sweet mercy, showed me myself and my sin. But He did not stop there.

I can't pin point a day or month, but sometime around 2010, God made the phrase I had heard from Pastor John from the pulpit and outside of the pulpit real to me. We've all heard him

say over and over, "Look to Christ"! But for the first time, that phrase became real to me -- *Christ became real to me!* When before, He was simply "the God of my parents," now He is to me "the altogether Lovely One." When before, I would rather muster up my filthy self-righteous rags, now I would rather look to the cross of Christ. It was He, the Person of Christ, who lived and died and rose again that I might be clothed in His perfect, spotless righteousness to stand blameless before my Heavenly Father. It was He who made me right with the God who deserved perfect love and obedience -- perfect love and obedience that I could never provide. It was He who was the "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," that I might be filled with joy. He was despised, that I might be accepted. He bore my griefs, carried my sorrows, He was wounded for my transgressions, bruised for my iniquities, and it is by His stripes that I am healed! (Isaiah 53:3, 5) There is nothing, *nothing* in me - nothing I have done or ever could do that could make me right with God. "Not I, but Christ."

It was Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century preacher and writer, who said: "The Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self: He tells us that we are nothing but that Christ is all in all. Remember, therefore, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee -- it is Christ; it is not thy joy in Christ -- it is Christ; it is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument -- it is Christ's blood and merits, therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ, as to Christ."

What I could not scrub away with all of my religious soap has been washed "white as snow" in the blood of the Son. I was the blind man whom God sent to the pool of Siloam to wash, and once he washed, his sight was restored.

In the words of Horatius Bonar's hymn:

**Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole.**

**Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load.**

**Thy work alone, O Christ, can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within.**

**Thy love to me, O God, not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest, And set my spirit free.**

**I bless the Christ of God; I rest on love divine;
And with unfaltering lip and heart I call this Savior mine.
His cross dispels each doubt; I bury in His tomb
Each thought of unbelief and fear, each lingering shade of gloom.**

**I praise the God of grace; I trust His truth and might;
He calls me His, I call Him mine, My God, my joy and light.**

**'Tis He Who saveth me, and freely pardon gives;
I love because He loveth me, I live because He lives.**

It was then that I saw the simplicity of the gospel. In light of this love - a "love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all," I couldn't go on living for myself. "And He died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them." (2 Corinthians 5:15) (Funny story: at the time, I kept this verse in my tennis shoes. Not the most comfortable idea of mine, but I was reminded of this precious promise every time the paper rubbed against my foot.)

Since then, God has been so kind to draw me ever nearer to Himself. He has proved Himself over and over and over again to be faithful even when I am weak and cold. I can only say with Hudson Taylor, "I feel very happy in His love, but I am so unworthy of all His blessings."

Courtney Crampton. September 2012