

Time of Grace Ministry  
**My Hands, His Hands: Final Blow?**

Isaiah 53:4-6  
March 24, 2013

Question for you today: Is the cross of Jesus an ugly thing or a beautiful thing?

Are you comfortable with the concept of a paradox? A paradox is a seeming contradiction and the Bible is full of them and it may just drive you crazy. You know, the Bible is a complex lengthy book with some simple messages, but some of great depth, as well. To navigate your ways through these very, very important ideas it's important to master the skill of grasping what seem to be contradictions.

Palm Sunday is full of those contradictions and I'd like to talk to you about those today. Palm Sunday, we see Jesus at his most vulnerable. He's made himself small; he's riding on a little donkey. And yet, he is riding as a king. Now, kings don't ride on donkeys that are not even fully grown yet and yet, that is how Jesus chose to enter his royal city.

The cross itself is an image of, what we consider, great beauty. Not only do we decorate our homes with them, our churches with them, not only are they favorite jewelry of Christians, but a cross was an instrument of the most horrific torture. And those two ideas – beauty and ugliness together – are at the core of the Christian message.

This Palm Sunday, I would like to ponder with you, celebrate with you, revel in, and worship God for the amazing and beautiful paradoxes of our faith. Today, on Palm Sunday, I would like to celebrate our salvation and the amazing and seemingly paradoxical way in which our Lord Jesus brought it to pass.

Every business that wants to do more than just be a kind of ma and pop little dinky operation needs to know how to present itself in a professional way to its hoped-for customers and clients. So what you need to do is develop a couple of things. One of them is a tagline. You need a slogan for what your business stands for. You have to assume that nobody knows who you are and what you do, so you need a phrase – like DuPont's, of course, is, "Better living through chemistry."

You also need to identify and set up a logo. You just have to do it; don't argue. It's something you need to do. And you can scratch one up yourself or you can hire your brother-in-law or you can get a local firm or you can go big. If you want to go big time, you will need to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars – maybe even millions – to develop a logo that is simple but powerful and communicates your message, your style, your mission, your value proposition to the country. So, for instance, if you're in the movie making business, if you're Paramount, you have a mountain. Get it? Mount, Paramount, mountain? So you see this mountain with a ring of stars and every movie begins with that logo. It's on their letterheads, it's on their studios; it's their sign. It's how they identify this is a Paramount picture.

And the idea is that just with those little cross lights you kind of get the sizzle and the pizzazz of the rollout of a new movie. You know, when they roll in the anti-aircraft searchlights and these pencils going up into the sky at night and they kind of move around like something big is happening here? You only roll out the search lights when something really big is going on in America, like the launching of a new movie. So Fox just has the strong letters “Fox” and then it’s got the searchlights up there.

Has it ever dawned on you that we Christians have the coolest logo in the whole world? But it’s a strange logo indeed because it is one of the many paradoxes – in fact, it’s the supreme paradox – of all the paradoxes in the Bible.

A paradox is a statement, two statements that seem to be contradictory but they’re both true, that’s what’s crazy. A paradox states one thing, seems to state another thing that contradicts it, but they’re both true. And that paradox is this: Our logo, our icon, our little picture symbol that represents everything we stand for is nothing less than the cross, which is simultaneously the paradox of the ugliest logo and most beautiful logo in the whole world.

It’s ugly because it is a macabre instrument of human torture; uglier than a noose, uglier than the electricity in the electric chair zapping somebody to death; uglier than the guillotine. The cross was used to torture people to death. Paradoxically, the cross is the promise of your release from death and on these last of my Lenten messages to you before the good news coming next week, on the Sunday of the Passion, I want to ponder a little bit with you one last time the bitter ironies of our hands and his hands and the cross of Christ involved the cruel hands to crucify. The Roman soldiers who spread eagled him down on ugly wood – innocent wood; it wasn’t the woods fault – spread eagled him down on a crossbar and nailed his hands or wrists down to the wood to stretch him out so that he would suffer and then hung him up so that all who passed by could see and make fun. And then, for good measure posted the sign of accusation above his head.

The gospel of John 19 says that Jesus was condemned by Pilate and taken out to be crucified. Just for good measure, the Roman governor had him flogged. Probably just since he was going to have him killed anyway, he might have even had sort of a perverse sense of mercy like, “If I bleed him half to death he won’t last as long on the cross,” because crucifixion was excruciating – that’s where we get that word. In the middle of “excruciating” you can see the letters “c-r-u-c-i” and that’s from the Latin word, “for the cross.” You could last for days. You would die of exposure, fever, delusions, thirst, until finally shock and loss of blood or perhaps even the strain of trying to breathe when you’re spread eagle like that. Maybe you get cramps and you can’t breathe properly any longer and you die of asphyxiation. But it was intended to be slow.

And they made you leave the body up there. The Roman way was to let you there as a warning to anyone else who would dare to repeat your crime. I told you last week about the pirates. Julius Caesar, one of his value propositions as emperor was cleaning the Mediterranean of pirates. And he strung them up along the Appian Way when he would catch them and leave them hang there to discourage piracy.

About a generation or two before Jesus was born there was a gigantic slave revolt. Have you seen the movie? There've been a bunch of them; Hollywood, about every thirty years or so, rolls out a new movie. Who was the hero of the Roman slaves? Spartacus. Did you ever hear of Spartacus? He was a great hero – his revolt actually succeeded for a little while, throwing a terror into the whole empire. He was finally caught and at least six thousand, according to Tacitus, six thousand of his followers were crucified and they were strung up, nailed to trees, and just left there to die slowly and were ordered – no Roman citizen was allowed to give them a decent burial – they were mandated to hang there so that the birds would come and peck their eyes out and that the wild animals would feast on their corpses. So not only to make them die in a horrible way, but to try to destroy their dignity and reputation, for the empire wanted no martyrs. So this was not only a way to kill enemies of the state, but to humiliate and degrade the reputations, as well. And that was the order Pilate gave. And now the bleeding Jesus took his hands to carry his own cross. Then he was nailed to it by evil, sinful hands.

The worst Roman soldiers might have been bored; they surely had done this before. You can't imagine that because you've never seen it. We don't live in that age anymore. Two thousand years ago was a time of rough and quick justice, especially if you weren't a citizen. It was like the Wild West where your trial might last a few minutes and there would be instant justice, rough justice. And back in the Wild West, everybody saw life and death. In that era, people saw their animals die. They witnessed dead animals. We hardly have any animals anymore; just our pets. Can you imagine what it's like when there are thousands of horses all over? People got used to seeing death. People were much closer connected to their farms and agriculture and they also were more closely connected to capital punishment, which was done quickly and – in the case of the Roman Empire – very casually. They just could pronounce it and the people would be dispensed with right then and there, especially if you weren't a citizen. And so the Romans pounded his hands in and settled in for what, to them, was going to be a boring wait because they could not report until execution was finished. So for all they knew, they had to make a day of just sitting there in the heat.

They stole his clothes, threw some dice to divvy up his clothes four ways, leaving Jesus with not much left. He very well might have been crucified utterly naked to humiliate him all the more. He didn't even have the dignity of clothes.

But you know what? The people screaming for his blood carry responsibility, as well. Their hands were on the hammer; it was their hands that crucified him, too. Pontius Pilate's fingerprints were all over that hammer but so were yours and mine for every time we declare war against God's claim on us, every time we sin, every time we break a Commandment knowingly or unknowingly, every time we set ourselves against the will of God, every time we show that we by nature have joined the rebellion, for Satan's slimy claw prints were on that hammer and whoever joins in Satan's rebellion grabs a piece of that hammer, too. You can hear the pounding in your mind, the sad, sick pounding, of the rebellion of sin. That's you and me, brother! You and me, sister! We're right there pounding those nails in, too.

That's the curse of all who are born into the rebellion of Adam and Eve. And what makes it worst of all is that God's hands were on that hammer, too. The Bible tells us it was his Father's will to cause him to suffer. And God the Father decided to punish his Son for the sins of the

world. That is how the guilt gets transferred and it is in that moment that the paradox of the law and the gospel – only that moment – that the paradox of law and gospel gets resolved because God the Father picked up the hammer too and it was his hand pounding in the nails into his Son.

The Bible seems to set before us a contradiction about the person of God. God says, “I punish iniquity, rebellion, and sin. I will not leave the guilty unpunished.” And then he says, “I forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin.” Those are like parallel lines. If you are a math major or even if you can remember back to your geometry class when you were a sophomore, parallel lines, by definition, never intersect. They go side-by-side like two railroad tracks, often to infinity. One might be called the law the other might be called the gospel. How can God punish sin and forgive sin at the same time and not become a total mush-mouth lying half-baked kind of pretend phony guy? Here’s where they intersect: On the cross, God had it both ways and only on Calvary did those lines intersect where he punished sin by pounding in the nails on his Son and in that very instant is able to forgive sin to you and to me for those sinners who pounded the nails and even God himself who pounded the nails, pounded it into the willing hands of someone who offered his hands to be wounded.

There is no better explanation of what just happened here on Calvary then that given by Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah, seven centuries before it happened. God explained – just as he had explained and predicted Palm Sunday through Zechariah – through Isaiah God explained what he was going to do and gave the most insightful, eloquent, beautiful summary of the meaning of the passion of the suffering of Christ and what that has to do with your life and mine today.

In the middle of Isaiah 53 there are some beautiful stanzas from a beautiful hymn and the middle one goes like this – it’s right in the middle – “Surely he took up our infirmities,” that “he” is Jesus; the coming Messiah. “He carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God.” “Stricken” is an old fashioned past participle of the word “strike,” which means “to hit.” We looked at him, hit by God – see, that’s what I just said a couple of minutes ago. His Father was pounding on him, too. We looked at him, gawked at him, being smacked by God, “smitten” by him – that’s the past participle of “smite,” just another word for “hit.” “Afflicted. He was pierced for our transgressions.” The greatest injustice the world had ever seen.

“He was crushed for our iniquities.” He staggered under a burden not of his own design, but with his beautiful hands – that’s what I talked to you about last week. He accepted that burden, though it crushed him.

Now here’s the most amazing paradox of all: “The punishment that brought us peace was upon him.” So punishing brings peace; wounding brings healing. “By his wounds we are healed.” The wounds of Christ bring healing to our sick souls for in his allowing himself to be wounded, the Father is now done punishing. And now Romans 8:1 is spoken to the world: “There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

It’s the great switcheroo, you might call it – isn’t it amazing? What a paradox! Wounds heal us. Punishment brings us peace. Crushing and piercing brings us liberation. “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” Don’t blow this off as for somebody else. Every man, woman, and child within the sound of my voice and the sound of Isaiah’s voice

right now is caught up in this. We're all equally implicated, but we all are equally redeemed for the blood that was shed on the cross is the blood of God. When Jesus fused God and man in himself, it means everything he did from then on was jointly done by God and man together. It was God who suffered; it was God who hung dying. It was the blood of God that dripped from his head, his back, his hands, his feet, and ultimately his side. It was God laid to rest and God who's going to burst forth again to victory.

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us,” sadly, sickently, ashamedly, “has turned to his own way.” But, the “Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Here's the beautiful paradox; I can just never get tired of just pondering the craziness of this all. Here, the sin of the world was punished. Here, forgiveness for the world can be announced. By his becoming a prisoner, we are set free. By his being wounded, our sickness is cured and healed. By his bleeding and the mess made of his body, we are cleansed. By his dying, we are made alive. By his death, we die in him. Your baptism, the Bible says, connects you, buries you with Christ. So your baptism helps you reenact Holy Week, the suffering, the death, the burial, and the resurrection. And through the word of God your faith connects you to this experience and Christ's time, Christ's experiences that you just are hearing about, becomes you! That's your sins being punished. You are being whipped. You are having the nails punched into you. All of your sin is dying and then you are set free, as well.

What Jesus went through, he went through our hell for us and now God's anger is gone. It no longer hovers over you and his pardon and forgiveness are yours to claim. This is a big deal! This is the most important story in all of Scripture; the most important thing in your life. And the gift bought at such terrible expense right here is your dearest possession. Now is the time to plant it. Today is the time to share it. And I hope that you let everyone in your circle of influence know that there is hope for fools and sinners like you and for me. There is healing, there is liberation, there is forgiveness, and there is life because of what his hands did to take away the guilt of what our hands did.

A wonderful poet named Leland Sateren said this and this is my parting gift to you from Mr. Sateren. He said this: “The hands of Christ seem very frail for they were broken by a nail. But only they reach heaven at last whom these frail broken hands hold fast.”

I hope that this little Bible study on Palm Sunday helps you to get more comfortable with God's paradoxes; with his seeming contradictions. I know it may seem to drive you crazy, but that is how God has rescued you from your worst nightmares – the sin and the guilt, death and Satan and hell and the grave – that all chase you.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem like a conquering hero and a few days later, went out the other side as a condemned criminal. He was cheered on Palm Sunday by adoring multitudes that cried “hosanna!” A few days later there were people in Jerusalem screaming, “Crucify him!”

That's a paradox; that's a seeming contradiction. Is he a conquering hero or is he the worst criminal on earth? And the answer is, “Yes.” That is how you and I have forgiveness of our sins and life.

I'd like to pray with you today. This Palm Sunday, this Holy Week, let's come before the Lord Jesus and thank him for the amazing paradox of what a humble king he is.

*Lord Jesus, we thank you for the amazing salvation that you brought about. You triumphed by seeming to lose. You give us life by dying. You conquered Satan by letting him drive sinful human beings to kill you. How can we ever praise you enough for what you went through on our behalf? We thank you and worship you. Help us now, with one more gift, and that's the gift of faith to believe this amazing message. That by your death ride, we might have a victorious and triumphant procession with you. We are counting on you and look forward to meeting you when we arise from death, as you did, and can praise you face to face. We pray all these things, Jesus, in your holy name, Amen.*

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mark Jeske, reminding you that every day is a day of God's amazing and wonderful grace for you.

### My Hands; His Hands: Final Blow?

**Isaiah 53:4-6:** Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But 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. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

#### Points to Ponder

1. How is the cross of Jesus an ugly thing and a beautiful thing?
2. Who is responsible for Jesus' death—the people who called for his crucifixion, Pilate, the Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross, God himself, someone else? Explain.
3. Law and gospel are two paradoxical themes of Scripture. At what moment were the two resolved—guilt and punishment meets the gift of God's Son?
4. Read Isaiah 53:5. How does punishment bring us peace?
5. That Jesus suffered in our place, died, rose, and offers us forgiveness and eternal life is the absolute core of the Christian faith. Do you know someone who needs to hear that his or her sins are forgiven?

#### The Bottom Line

In one of the most beautiful paradoxes in Scripture, the innocent Jesus took on the burden of our sin on Calvary. Our sin, our hands, nailed him to the cross. His hands carried that burden, and he was punished for us. Jesus' wounds heal us; his punishment forgives us.

You can dig deeper into your Bible by reading more about these truths from the lesson:

- **Jesus Suffered for Us:** Mark 10:45; Luke 9:22; Romans 8:3; Philippians 2:5-8; 1 Timothy 2:5,6
- **Jesus Brings Peace:** Matthew 11:28; John 14:27; John 16:33; Colossians 3:15