

Sunday of the Passion

SUFFERING THE CONSEQUENCES GIVES GROUNDS FOR GOD'S GRACE

Isaiah 50:4–9a

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Analysis by Mark Marius

*4The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.*

*Morning by morning he wakens –
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.*

*5The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.*

*6I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.*

*7The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;*

*8he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?*

Let us stand up together.

Who are my adversaries?

Let them confront me.

9It is the Lord GOD who helps me;

who will declare me guilty?

DIAGNOSIS: Getting Dissed

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Servants Suffering Displacement*

The demands from God are great. God gives us the tongue of a teacher to sustain others with God's word. Many times we choose to use other words that cause damage rather than the words from God. We easily reject our calling to be the suffering servant. Because even when we trust the word God has given us to share, we suffer scorn and retribution from those who find God's word offensive or convicting. So, whether it is by God or the world, we suffer exile.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Servants Suffering Disrespect*

God also gives us ears to listen to God's Word. But in all reality, we don't always trust what we hear from God and entertain other voices. Voices that appeal to making our lives comfortable. But even if we are able to reject the other voices and only listen to God, we may be called to go places that will judge us harshly and physically abuse us. We either lose respect from the world for trusting God over earthly powers or disrespect God for trusting the comfort the world offers. Any way you slice it, we fear being struck by God or our enemies.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Servants Suffering Disgrace*

Judgment comes from all sides –either from God for failing to live like this suffering servant, or from the world for not conforming to its standards. The time will come when we will be disgraced, one way or another, and separated from both.

PROGNOSIS: God Takes Our Dis Away

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Suffering Servants Saved by Grace*

Our fears are met by faith. Our abuse is met with nurture. God is faithful and cares for all the exiled. This suffering servant, that is ultimately fulfilled by the passion of Christ, is the help we need. Christ suffers as we suffer and is exiled as we are exiled. It is his faithfulness that allows him to suffer not only the insults and spitting, the beatings and the beard pulling, but more importantly, death—for us. And God comes to Christ's aid to raise him from the dust, from the grave, to new life. Suffering no longer is a disgrace but a chance to experience God's grace.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Suffering Servants Met with Glory*

Through Christ's death and resurrection we are vindicated and we share the glory found in the cross. Through baptism God is as near as God can get. The Holy Spirit dwelling within us reminds us that God sees no shame for his children. We are as beloved as the day we were born from water and the Word.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Suffering Servants Take Their Place*

With God's demands met by the Suffering Servant we voluntarily stand united with him. We seek to console all who suffer and all who are living with shame. We welcome adversaries and those who view suffering as a weakness. But we meet their confrontation with support. We take their fear and replace it with God's faith. Through our own suffering, and through suffering with others, we manifest the joy that comes from God helping us. We show the world there is no shame in being helped by God; nor do we, or they, suffer any guilt for our shortcomings. Because God's declaration of forgiveness is for all to share.