The people of Judah were suffering when Isaiah came to them with the message found in Isaiah 53. They were experiencing the curses that God said would come to them if they rejected his covenant and rebelled against him. And now they have to go into exile, to live in a foreign land, cut off from God, alienated from him. The worst part of it is that God is rejecting them.

Now Isaiah comes to them with this prophesy about God's righteous servant who will suffer God's wrath for them. And when he does, their punishment for sins would be complete and they could be restored to God again. This is new. The Judeans had never heard of this righteous servant before. Who is this servant? When will he come?

Only one man fits the description of the Suffering Servant, the man Jesus Christ. That what Phillip, the evangelist in Acts 8 told the Ethiopian eunuch. And that's what Peter said 1Peter 2:21 - Jesus Christ is the one who suffered and died as the guilt offering to bring us back to God.

We are getting ready to remember Christ's sacrifice on Good Friday next week. As we look forward to remembering this event, Isaiah 53:10 - 12 teaches us what Christ's death means for us. Today there are many different ideas about what the cross means. People today cannot accept that a loving God would put Jesus to death. Why would he do that? What's the point of it? "God is not wrath, he's love," they say. So how does Isaiah 53:10 - 12 tell us about why the God of love poured out his wrath?

God plans to vindicate his suffering servant
1. because he will become the guilt offering
2. because he will justify many
3. because he will make intercession for the transgressors

1. Because he will become the guilt offering
   Out of all the verses in the whole Bible, Isaiah 53:10 is probably the hardest to swallow: "Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer." Why would God want his righteous servant to suffer? Why would God want his own beloved Son to suffer? It sounds so awfully sadistic that many people today have chosen to ignore this verse or explain it away. One author said that God is relentlessly affectionate, why would he cause his Son, or anyone to suffer?

   What kind of crushing and suffering is this? In Isaiah 53, the servant is crushed for "our" sin. Crushing in the Old Testament often has to do with shame. In Jeremiah 44, the prophet accuses the people of idolatry when they refuse to humble themselves or fear God by obeying his law. They are arrogant because they live their own way, ignoring and rejecting God. So God will humble them when he rejects them as his own people. They will suffer dejection and shame because of their sin.

   And the word used for "suffer" in verse 10 is used by God elsewhere in judgement. It's often translated, "afflicted." God said he would afflict his people with diseases if they rebel against his covenant. In Deuteronomy 28 the Lord says that he will strike them with "wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish."
And when Israelites got these diseases, Leviticus 13 - 14 says that they are ceremonial unclean. That meant they had to live outside the city and could have no contact with God or his people. The point was not that they were contagious, but that God was showing his people that they needed to be holy. A leper, for example, is not considered contagious, he is called "unclean," and therefore cannot enter God's presence.

The Suffering Servant is being treated as if he had been unfaithful to God's covenant - he's being treated according to the sins Israel committed. Not because he was himself sinful, but, Isaiah 53:10 say, as a guilt offering. The purpose and laws regulating the guilt offering are found in Leviticus 5 and 7. Israelites had to bring a guilt offering when they profaned holy things. For example, an Israelite desecrated the temple if took the tools dedicated for use in the temple and used them for something else. Or if an Israelite ate the meat from an offering that was meant for the Levites.

The Lord required a guilt offering also when Israelites committed idolatry. In this case, the holy thing being desecrated was one of God's own people. If you worship another god, you desecrate yourself. The Lord says, "You broke faith with me...because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites." And the Lord also required a guilt offering when an Israelite committed a crime against a neighbour's property.

In all of these cases, the purpose of the guilt offering was to repair a broken relationship. You cannot live at peace with your neighbour if you stole his camel (or his car). You cannot live at peace with God if you violate his law and desecrate his temple, where he lives. But when you bring a guilt offering to God, he forgives you and the relationship is restored. The result: you can stand before God again; you can live with him again.

God doesn't like watching his own son die - that's not the point of this text. He delights in the result of the Servant's suffering. The result is that the Servant will see his offspring. Who are his offspring? We can find a clue in Isaiah 49. In verse 14 Zion - God's Holy mountain, where Jerusalem and the temple stand - is complaining to God. "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." Zion is complaining because the LORD sent her inhabitants to Babylon. But the days are coming, says the LORD, when Zion will be populated again, so much that there won't be enough room for everyone. Then Zion will say, "Where did all these people come from? Who bore me these children?" (v. 21).

The answer is found in 53:10 - the Suffering Servant bore them to you when he paid the guilt offering that brought God's people back from exile - when he made them holy to the LORD again.

The Judeans understood that they went into exile to suffer for their sins. But even after they returned from exile, they knew that they were still far from God, alienated from him. After their return, Ezra, the scribe cried out to God in shame and anguish, "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached the heavens....Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence." Ezra is worried that God will destroy the remnant because of their sin.
But God will not destroy his remnant, he will save them by doing what no one could have even imagined. Jesus, his Son, came to be the guilt offering that really brings people back to God.

Yes, God is relentlessly affectionate. He poured out his wrath on Jesus because he loves you. And Jesus loves you too. He gave himself as the guilt offering because, more than anything, he wanted you to come back to God. God didn't love to see his Son suffer. But he vindicated his son for his willingness to suffer the labour pains that brought you life.

2. Because he will justify many

People have objected to this explanation of the cross because it's all about God's wrath. Why would God have to be so angry? William Young, author of the now famous book, *The Shack*, once said in an interview, "I'm not a penal substitution guy....I don't see the Father pouring out his wrath on the Son. I see the human race pouring out their wrath on the Son."

God isn't angry, people say, he's only loving. He doesn't judge us, he only saves us. So people come up with a different explanation of the cross. They have different analogies. They say, "It's like Jesus jumped in front of a bus for us to save us from danger."

Today, people come up with these analogies because they don't want to believe that God is angry with us because of sin. But if you go that route, what are you saying about the Lord's guilt offering? What if you say, "I'm not need a guilt offering because I'm not guilty of anything. God has no reason to be angry with me." Then you are saying that Jesus could have found another way to save you. Then you trample his sacrifice under foot because you don't know what you need to be saved from.

But Isaiah 53:11 shows us a better way. The LORD says that his servant will justify many. This is courtroom language. It has nothing to do with a bus or some other random danger that you might find yourself in. verse 11 puts you in God's courtroom because you are being charged for crimes against God. That's the danger you're in - so much worse than being hit by a bus.

In court, God will decide what to do with his own creation, his own children. How can the just Judge of all creation allow people to commit injustices. He cannot be the just judge and ignore all the sins even his own people commit. Yes, he loves his creation, but he needs to deal with their sin. What will he do?

So here we are before God's judgement seat. But verse 11 shows us the solution. It answers the question, "how can justice be satisfied and God's people live and be free?" Verse 11 says that the Servant will stand up for us. He will represent us in court. When God says, "will Israel please rise and hear the accusations against him?" The Servant stands up as our representative.

He represents us by bearing our iniquities. He takes our sin on his own shoulders and is treated as if he committed our crimes against God. The verdict comes down on his head, "Guilty as charged."

The Servant isn't suffering a random or arbitrary death. He paid our price to the Just Judge so that we could go free. When Jesus came to earth he knew what he had to do; he knew
all about Isaiah 53:11. He went to the cross to satisfy God's justice. When he did, he justified us - he made us right with God again. So, today, you stand innocent before the Judge.

That's why Jesus was satisfied when it was over. He came back from punishment and death to see that he had brought many others to glory. He came to do a specific job and he finished it. As the Father loves you, so does the Son. So it's true, as they say, God isn't angry with you. But never forget what had to happen in order to make that true.

3. Because he will make intercession for transgressors

At the end of this verse, God declares the result of all his servant's suffering and shame. God will "give him a portion among the great and will divide the spoils with the strong." God doesn't delight in suffering. He delights in what the Servant is willing to do for God's people. The servant was brought low, but he will be vindicated. He became a servant, but God will make him king of kings. Why?

Because the righteous servant became a transgressor and poured out his life for transgressors. A transgressor is a rebel. This word appears in 1 and 2 Kings when describing revolt against a king, a attempt to gain power. Transgression is what people do to gain their independence from God. It is a breach of faithfulness. God reacts to transgression by putting down the revolt and punishing those who tried to dethrone him.

But one man was willing to stand up and plead their cause. The Servant of God, who is the Lord Jesus. That's what Isaiah means by saying he "interceded." He was willing to plead with God for them. Who does that? Would stand up in court for a criminal? Who would willing associate with losers? Look how hard it was for Peter to associate with Jesus when Jesus was on trial. He denied Jesus three times because he didn't want what was coming to him.

Yet the Lord Jesus was willing to stand up for Peter and the rest of us in God's divine Tribunal. He says, "take my life instead and spare them." He pleads with God to accept his sacrifice, his guilt offering to take away our rebellion and make us clean.

What Jesus was willing to do is culturally counter-intuitive. He had nothing to do with the rebellion, yet he threw himself in with their lot. He was innocent, yet he asked to be treated as if he were guilty and took their place in the judgement. The Lord did not gain any earthly honour while suffering as he did for these things.

But success in God's eyes has nothing to do with money, praise, high position and status, or personal gain. The Servant is rewarded because was willing to lay down his life because wanted to live his Father's way and because of his love for people like you. So even though Jesus became like a rebel against the king, God made him King.

How did he do it? The apostle Peter tells us in the New Testament that when Jesus bore our sins, "he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." The Lord Jesus could endure the suffering, the beatings, the mockery, the shame, because he knew for sure that his Heavenly Father would vindicate him.

And now that Christ has done that, you also are vindicated. You're not rebels anymore. Peter says that you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. You are also exalted and you get to be with God, too.
So why did the God of love pour out his wrath? Is there a contradiction here? Not at all. God's creation, his children turned on him. He found the only way to make restoration possible. You see, he pour out his wrath on His own Son to vindicate people like us. Without Christ you are a transgressor and worthy of God's wrath. You are filled with guilt and shame. But Jesus has changed all that for you. He vindicated you. Now you are exalted and may freely stand before God and call. You are restored to him, the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul.

So, there is no contradiction between his wrath and his love. The Father poured out his wrath on His son because he loves you. The Son accepted this just judgement on your behalf because he loves you too.

Isaiah 53:10 - 12 teaches us how to remember and celebrate the cross. Not as a random act of violence. Not as a simple act of self-sacrifice either. Know what Jesus did for you. He dealt with your sin and he brought you to God. Then you will be able to humble yourselves before God and begin to live by the verdict he gave you.

Then you, like the Lord Jesus, can entrust yourself to him who judges justly. Live for God and be willing to give yourselves to him, even if that means sadness, loneliness, and pain in this life. Endure your failures, along with the accusations and mockery of others. And share in the grief and sorrow of others, too. You can do all these things when you know that you live with God now, and he cares for your soul. You can endure now because you know how this ends. It looks bad, but Jesus has overcome sin and has vindicated you. Entrust yourselves to God. He promises to exalt you.