

A Superhero, He's Not

Presentation Handout

Popularity of Superhero Movies

- We are obsessed with superheroes and movies about them!
 - Explosion of movies made in the last decade, 11 alone from 2018-2021
 - One alone grossed 2.8 billion worldwide with the top three all-time grossing 6.6 billion worldwide.
- What draws us to superheroes?
 - Humans are looking for some sort of role model who is “good” and who has attained this “good” in the muck, the “junk,” of life.
 - Humans need the help of someone outside of ourselves.

Adapted from: *Why are superheroes so popular?* | Voyage | [Comics](#) | by Julian Sicam

- So, it shouldn't surprise us to see imagery-parallels to Jesus and His life in superheroes, like Superman for example, who has:
 - An all-seeing father from afar
 - Earthly parents
 - An important event-sign at age 12—saves children in a bus crash
 - A time of maturity—12 years in odd jobs
 - A public life in which he performs a series of miracles
 - An ultimate test—a defining moment—at age 33

Adapted from: *Superman Isn't Jesus* | Alicia Cohn | ChristianityToday.com | June 19, 2013

- Here is the problem with all this Superman-Jesus imagery-parallels—the “Man of Steel” fights evil with the similar brute force as the bad guys. Yes, Superman and other superheroes use it for good, but it is still brute force—“pow, bang, boom,” etc. In a sense it is “fighting evil with evil.”
- Sadly, many people think God operates the same way—fighting evil with brute force. He is just more powerful, like a superhero.... Is this true? Ah..., no!
- Here is a profound insight from Richard Bauckham that “flips” one's thinking in this area:

“When the slaughtered lamb is seen ‘in the midst of’ the divine throne in heaven {[Revelation 5:6](#)}, the meaning is that Christ's sacrificial death belongs to the way God rules the world.” *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*
- Step back...and let the truth of this thought “sink” deep down into your very being.
 - The Godhead doesn't fight evil or save humanity by just using more brute force than evil, like superheroes do. Instead, They fight evil and rescue us from sin through a divine, other-centered, selfless love that suffers—revealing the Godhead values sinful humans more than Themselves, than life itself!
- We see this amazing, beautiful, unimageable truth in [Isaiah 53](#)—the most important of the “Servant Songs” in the book of Isaiah.

Backstory/Context for “Servant Songs”

- Four Different “Songs”
 - Servant’s Call – *Isaiah 42:1-9*
 - Servant’s Commission – *Isaiah 49:1-13*
 - Servant’s Commitment – *Isaiah 50:4-11*
 - Servant’s Career/Suffering – *Isaiah 52:13-53:12*
- *Isaiah 52:13-53:12* is the most quoted/cited and alluded to Old Testament passage in the New Testament:
 - *52:15* -> *Romans 15:20-21*
 - *53:1* -> *John 12:38; Romans 10:16*
 - *53:4* -> *Matthew 8:16-17*
 - *53:5, 9* -> *1 Peter 22-25*
 - *53:7-8* -> *Acts 8:32-33*
 - *53:12* -> *Luke 22:37*
 - Plus 35 additional allusions (none quotes/citations)

Suffering Servant {*Isaiah 52:13-53:12*}

- **God’s glory revealed in suffering** {*52:13; 53:12*}
 - Amazingly, the suffering Servant is honored by God and others because of His willingness to suffer, not His display of brute power, like superheroes.
 - And this display of unexpected, selfless suffering on the Godhead’s behalf in the Servant Messiah/Jesus is what wins the universe—fallen and unfallen beings’ hearts—to God for eternity!
 - This is significant, since the Jewish people of Jesus’ time expected a Messiah-King who would politically deliver/liberate them from the Romans through brute power.
 - Instead, this passage and Jesus taught a suffering Messiah who would bring salvation through suffering and death to Israel and the nations (Gentiles/us).
- **Servant didn’t deserve to suffer** {*53:4-6, 8, 10-11*}
 - In these six verses the pronoun “our” and the preposition “for” are used eight times along with words like: “borne”, “carried”, “wounded”, “bruised”, “chastisement”, “laid”, “iniquity”, “cut off”, “transgressions”, “stricken”, “bruise”, “grief”, “offering”, and “bear.”
 - “Our,” “for,” and the words used with them all refer to Israel’s and ultimately all of humanity’s sins, not anything the Servant Messiah/Jesus did wrong. This is obvious by the fact the Servant is described as pure, sinless and righteous {*vv. 7, 9, 11*}. He suffered because of our sin, not His own.
- **Servant suffers the covenant curses**
 - Some of the covenant curses mentioned in *Isaiah 52:13-53:12* are:
 - “Griefs/sickness” {*v. 4* -> *Deuteronomy 28:59, 61; Isaiah 1:5*}
 - “Smitten/smite/stricken” {*v. 4* -> *Deuteronomy 28:22, 25, 27, 28, 35; Isaiah 1:5*}
 - “Stripes/bruises” {*v. 5* -> *Isaiah 1:6*}

- The covenant curses described in **Deuteronomy 28 & 29** and **Isaiah 1** should have ultimately been suffered by Israel. And to some extent they were but **not** to their full extent.
- Why? Because Jesus suffered the full extent of their covenant curses becoming the curse Himself!. This is why Israel, and every other sinful human being has God's grace and hope of salvation and transformation!
- **Servant suffers the ultimate covenant curse—death {vv. 4c, 8c}**
 - This covenant curse was death—the second death, being eternally lost and separated from God {**Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8**}.
 - Though many thought Jesus was suffering God's curse, later they realized He was dying for their sins and curse.
 - The second death experience Jesus suffered is further illustrated by the idea of being “cut off” {**v. 8c**}. Now, this is where it gets really awe amazing about our God.
 - The Hebrew word for “cut off” {**v. 8c**} is not the normal word used for “cutting” or making a covenant in the Old Testament. In **v. 8** this word has more of the meaning of “dividing,” which alludes back to a story in **Genesis 15**.

Covenant “Cutting-off/Dividing” {Genesis 15}

- The story begins with Abram feeling afraid after a battle to rescuing his nephew Lot and his family. Then his feelings shift to struggling with God's apparent delay in fulfilling His covenant promise to bless the world through him, through his descendants, particularly the “Seed” singular descendant—the Messiah/Jesus {**vv. 1-3**}.
- God graciously encourages Abram/Abraham through re-confirming His covenant promise to him {**vv. 4-5, 7**}.
- Abram believes God—takes Him at His word/promise. Yet, he still wrestles with the non-fulfillment, believing that it will happen {**vv. 5, 8**}. There is hope for us unbelieving or struggling human beings too.
- God used the common covenant making ceremony of Abram's day to re-confirm and strengthen his faith..., but with an unexpected, amazing twist.
 - Abram was to get a three-year-old heifer, female goat, and ram, which he was to divide/“cut off” in two, laying the two animal pieces opposite each other with a path between them. For the turtle dove and young pigeon, Abram probably laid each bird whole opposite each other, like the heifer, goat, and ram.
 - Side note: all these animals were sacrificial animals in the Old Testament Levitical sanctuary service.
- As night darkened Abram saw a horrifying (awe/awful/profound) sight: a “smoking oven” and “burning torch” appeared and passed through the severed animals and birds.
 - The combination of a “smoking oven” and “burning torch” symbolize God's presence as we discover from the Mt Sinai story when God came down to the mountain to speak directly with the children of Israel and make a covenant with them {**Exodus 19:18; 20:18**}. This interpretation fits this story perfectly in **Genesis 15** since God is also making a covenant with Abram {**v. 18**}.
- In Abram's time and throughout the Old Testament, the servant or defeated leader is the one who passed through the severed animals symbolizing that if he/she didn't abide by the covenant terms, he/she would be severed like the animals were. The conquering

the leader never passed through the severed animals. That would have shown weakness, not power.

- More than likely, Abram also passed through the severed animals. But, that is not Moses' emphasis here. He is trying to make another profound point.
- Amazingly, God is emphasizing to Abram (and to us too), His faithfulness to His everlasting/new covenant promise(s), or He will die by dismemberment, death, if He doesn't! Wait a minute. Are we not supposed to promise God we will be faithful? No, because we can't! That is the point here.
 - Why three animals severed and two divine symbols walking through the severed animals. Could it be, the three severed animals represent the Godhead—Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit and the two divine symbols, God the Father and Jesus?
 - Either way, the Godhead pledges ***Their*** very existence on Their promise to work out our salvation because God's people and ultimately the whole human race has failed in their covenant faithfulness, sinning and living a life of sin. So now the Father promised a Human Being who would be faithful to His covenant and who would (image this) die for the covenant curses that sinful humanity deserves. This is the Messiah/Jesus—the suffering Servant of ***Isaiah 53***.
- Now back to this dismemberment/severing for covenant unfaithfulness. Shouldn't God's people and ultimately sinful humanity suffer this fate. Yes! But this is the amazing other-centered, selfless love of God—He suffers our covenant curse in our place!!

Divine Dismemberment

- As sinful Israel and humanity repeatedly failed the Godhead stepped in to suffer their covenant curse—the second death, eternal death and separation from God—the covenantal dismemberment or severing we see in ***Genesis 15***.
- On Calvary's cross we see the full revelation of this covenantal curse suffering as Jesus cries out in “gut-wrenching” horror as He feels the eternal separation from His Father: My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me” {***Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34***}?
- In light of the Godhead's implied oath of Self-dismemberment in ***Genesis 15***, God is being ripped from God! Deity torn from Deity! The Godhead is “torn asunder” as They suffer the covenant curse of dismemberment for sinful humanity (us)!!
- Jesus suffered (actually the whole Godhead) our covenant curse, the agony of eternal separation between God and man that we all deserve, as our Substitute & Surety, so we might have the covenant blessings of eternal life!! Wow!! What a God!!
 - “...God was *in Christ reconciling* the world to Himself...” ***2 Corinthians 5:18-19***
 - “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, *having become a curse* for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)...” ***Galatians 3:13-14***
 - “How much more shall the blood of Christ, *who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God*...” ***Hebrews 9:14***

LIVING CHOICE: How does it make you feel knowing the Godhead was willing “ripped” apart for your salvation? Will you say “yes” to Their invitation of salvation with a heart of overflowing love in return?