

Isaiah 53:4-12  
Hebrews 5:1-10

**Burden Bearers**  
Pastor Dennis Plourde

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Joe wanted to see snow. Joe not only wanted to see snow, he wanted to see it snowing. Joe was one of the Thai leaders on the Thai Xtreme Team\* visiting the greater Los Angeles area in late April, early May 2002. Joe had grown up in Bangkok and had seen pictures of snow but had never seen it snow. Now we knew he would see Disneyland, Universal City, the Jay Leno show, a Dodgers game, the rich areas of Los Angeles and also spend time with some who lived on the streets of Los Angeles. We also knew that he would spend some time on the Hopi and Navajo Reservations in Arizona and spend time at the Grand Canyon, but snow – that was another story. We would carry his burden.

Isaiah gives us an image of our burden bearer. The image is of Christ, our shepherd. One who would bear our iniquities.

Now I am told that sheep are dumb (maybe if you don't like "dumb" we can say they are not smart!). Sheep are easily led astray. If they wander away from the flock and can still hear but not see the flock they cannot find their way back. They can be stubborn. Anyone who has spent any time around sheep will acknowledge this. Phillip Keller in his book, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, writes about his first sheep:

But the day I bought them I also realized that this was but the first stage in a long, lasting endeavor in which from then on, I would, as owner, have to continually lay down my life for them, if they were to flourish and prosper. Sheep do not "just take care of themselves," as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care.

And we are equated with sheep! We will follow almost anything or anyone. We will deny the existence of a Creator God and yet believe that spirits long dead can be channeled through us. We will not believe in a God of Grace but will spend countless hours, days or years working to earn our salvation, a place in eternity. We are in constant need of attention and meticulous care!

Isaiah reminds us that Christ came to bring us grace. Christ bore our sins, "*Upon him was our punishment laid*" (53:5b). He took our burdens and carried them for us. One of the images of the Old Testament is that of the "scapegoat" (Lev. 16:8ff). Once a year a goat would be brought before the High Priest and the sins of the people, including the High Priest, would be placed on the head of the goat and it would then be driven out of the city to the wilderness, carrying away the sins of the people. Christ became the "scapegoat" for our sins, once and for all.

I like the way the NRSV translates the second part of the eighth verse, "*Who could have imagined his future?*" We would not have written the story the way God did. We may have invented a religion that deals with works, etc. We may have come up with sacrifices to appease our god. But we would never have come up with the gift of Grace. The writer of Hebrews affirms Isaiah's image of Christ our burden bearer, "*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered*" and

*having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). He became our burden bearer.*

We all carry around burdens. It is a part of who we are, our Protestant work ethic, our pioneer spirit. We want to believe we can do it ourselves. We can tame any land. We move into the wilderness and make it a place of life and we survive. We do it alone. One of our favorite PBS programs is “Good Neighbors”. The Good’s have decided to give up their middle-class lifestyle and become self-sufficient. They transform their front and backyard into a small farm. They get pigs, goats and chickens, plant crops and seek to live off what they produce. They give up the telephone, etc. Tom even works out a way to produce his own electricity. But in all of this they still need help from time to time. Without a telephone they have to visit the neighbors to make a call when they are in need of a vet, etc. As much as they try to be self-sufficient they still from time to time need someone to help carry their burdens.

There are the burdens we carry and there are the burdens we would like to carry but we cannot. We cannot carry the pain of another. We cannot take away the sins of another. As much as we may want to we know that there are some decisions that we cannot make for another, some burdens we cannot carry. And yet we like to think we can. We try and fail or disappoint.

What are we to do then? We can walk beside and point them to the One who can carry the burden, take away the pain and who has carried our burdens/sins for us. Our task is not to carry the burden but to point them to the One who can, the suffering servant of Isaiah, the High Priest of the Hebrews.

We will fail and disappoint. It is not that we have planned it that way. It is just that we cannot carry the burdens. There are days when we cannot even carry our own burdens let alone the burdens of another. We too stand in need of God’s grace and forgiveness. We do, though, know the One who can and who has the willingness and ability to carry all our burdens. As we have noted, even the High Priest had to have his sins placed on the head of the “scapegoat”. We too stand in need of prayer, of a burden bearer. But Christ came to stand in the place of High Priest once and for all.

Our task is to walk the journey together. Our task is to stand along side and support one another. We hold, comfort and strengthen one another. We help with the burden but we must admit that we cannot carry it. The One who can is not us! We are healed and our burdens have been lifted because of Him and he is the one who carries the burdens and lifts them from our shoulders. *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that bought us peace was upon him, by his wounds we are healed” (Is. 53:5 NIV).*

Joe wanted to see it snowing. We carried his burden – every now and then he would remind us, “When will I see it snow?” We gave him little encouragement. It was late spring in southern California. We had experienced days in the mid-80’s and as much as we longed to show him snow it didn’t seem to be possible. We could do a lot, but snow!!!

Part of the Xtreme experience was a visit to the Hopi and Navajo reservations in Arizona. Part of the reservation experience was to prepare a lamb for dinner (now a word of caution, don't let the participants make friends with the lamb prior to its demise. We had arrived the night before and the lamb was tethered near-by, who can resist such?) The time came the next morning when the lamb was to be slaughtered. The team was to assist. The lamb was silent as it was being led to the place of slaughter. As the lamb gave up its life it began to snow! Someone quoted another verse from Isaiah, "'Come now let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow'" (Is. 1:18 NIV).

Christ bears our burdens.

\* Xtreme Teams are a program of International Ministries of the ABC/USA that seeks to immerse young adults (19-29) in an intense mission experience. Teams have gone from the US to the Philippines, Thailand, Brazil, Bolivia, Russia and Eastern Europe. Teams have come to the United States from Thailand and Eastern Europe.

The participants only know their destination. Their daily schedule is not shared and they engage in a variety of mission experiences, often life-changing. For more information on the program go to [www.internationalministries.org](http://www.internationalministries.org) and follow the Xtreme Team prompts – pull down the Go tab and find Xtreme Teams. The 2010 destination is Egypt!

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989  
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989  
Keller, Phillip, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, World Wide Publications, Minneapolis, MN, 1970 (p.20/21)