

The Suffering Servant



“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5-6)

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Introduction

- I. Isaiah 53 has often been called the “Suffering Servant” passage.
 - A. It is the fourth in a series of passages dealing with “the Servant” or “the Servant of the Lord.”
 - B. The gospel writers identify Jesus of Nazareth as fulfilling these verse.
 - C. We are given a view of His life and character in the days of His flesh, His tenderness as well as His power, and the great deliverance He would bring, not only for the Jews, but for all the world.
- II. Isaiah began his ministry about 740 B.C. and ended in 680 B.C.
 - A. God, through Isaiah, gives us a clear picture of what was to happen, not only in the immediate future for Israel, but how God was going to bring the Messiah, His “Suffering Servant,” into the world.
 - 1. Isaiah’s immediate discussion in chapters 40 through 66 is the Babylonian captivity and the reasons for it, and finally the restoration from it.
 - 2. However, there was going to be a greater deliverance than that from Babylon, and there would be a greater “messiah” than Cyrus.
 - B. Isaiah 53 is one of the best loved passages of Scripture (cf. Acts 8:29–35).
 - C. However, the “Servant of the Lord” of Isaiah 53 is introduced earlier in the book of Isaiah, and is mentioned in four separate sections of the book.

Discussion

- I. **The Servant Has A Mission (Isa. 42:1–4)**
 - A. Who is it that God upholds, chooses, delights in and gives His spirit to?
 - 1. A servant!
 - 2. God rejects demagogues and overlords and chooses a servant!
 - B. Christ applies these verses to Himself (Matt. 12:15–21).
 - C. The Servant was to be chosen by God (Isa. 42:1).
 - 1. Not just anyone could perform this task.
 - 2. God would delight in this One (cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5).
 - D. A demonstration of the delight the Father would have on Him was the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Him (John 1:29–34; Luke 4:18; Isa. 49:8).
 - E. He stands in sharp contrast with worldly conquerors (Isa. 42:2).
 - 1. King Cyrus is introduced later in this book (Isa. 44:28; 45:1).
 - 2. The Servant’s demeanor is different than that of ordinary men.
 - 3. Jesus did not enter into violent disputes with false teachers.
 - 4. Jesus used the power of words.
 - 5. “No man ever spoke like this Man” (John 7:46).
 - F. Christ would have pity on their low estate (Isa. 42:3; Matt. 9:36).
 - 1. He would not crush men, nor quench their spirit.
 - 2. He would not bind burdens hard to bear (Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:5, 10).
 - 3. The Beatitudes are a wonder expression of this (Matt. 5:1–12).
 - 4. Think of His kind and tender invitation (Matt. 11:28–30).

- G. There is an implied difficulty—the possibility of growing weak (Isa. 42:4).
 - 1. His mission is to the “coastlands” or the “islands” (cf. Matt. 12:21).
 - 2. The kingdom of Cyrus was limited.
 - 3. The Law of Moses was for the nation of Israel.

II. The Servant Has Great Difficulties In His Mission (Isa. 49:1–7)

- A. The “Servant” is the speaker in these verse.
 - 1. He did not take this duty upon Himself.
 - 2. The Lord called Him into this service.
- B. Again, the “coastlands” are invited to listen (Isa. 49:1).
- C. The Lord knew His Servant from His mother’s womb—this rules out the possibility of the Servant being the nation of Israel.
- D. The Servant was to “restore the preserved ones of Israel” (Isa. 49:6).
 - 1. Paul was among this remnant (Rom. 9:1–8; 11:1–5).
 - 2. Christ is the light to the Gentiles (Matt. 4:12–16; Isa. 9:1–2; Acts 13:46–48).
 - a) Jesus reminded the Syro-Phoenician woman that he had been sent to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:22–24).
 - b) When the disciples were sent out on the “limited commission” they were explicitly told not to go to the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5–6).
 - c) In the “great commission” they were sent to all nations (Matt. 28:19).

III. The Servant Will Suffer (Isa. 50:4–9)

- A. Having shown the omnipotence of God and thus the sure fulfillment of His promises, Isaiah introduces the Servant again to prepare us for Isaiah 53.
- B. This passage was fulfilled by Christ (Matt. 27:26).
- C. Servants of God have always had difficulty (cf. Matt. 5:10–12).
- D. The Servant would not flee like Jonah (Isa. 50:5; Jonah 1:3).
- E. The striking language of Isa. 50:6 calls to mind the suffering of our Lord before His journey to the cross (Matt. 26:67–68; 27:26–31).
- F. No reason is given in this section of Scripture for His suffering—we are left to wonder why He had to suffer.
 - 1. Others may desert Him as He goes deeper into His work (Isa. 50:8), but the one who vindicates Him is always near (cf. John 8:29; 16:32).
 - 2. He would be vindicated by the Lord (Rom. 1:3–4).

IV. The Servant Suffers For Sin (Isa. 52:13—53:12)

- A. "It is generally acknowledged by students of the prophets that in this the fourth of the Servant Songs is attained the loftiest height of prophecy. It was pointed out in the third song (50:4–11) that the Servant will suffer in obedience to the word of God, but the purpose of His suffering was not explained. This final song deals with both purpose and achievement. The Servant is to conquer as a sufferer, not as a warrior (cf. Rev. 5:4–6). From His shameful suffering and inhumane treatment He is to emerge in triumph and glory. In this song the Servant neither appears in person nor speaks, but He is the central figure in the message of both Jehovah and the prophet. No time factor is found in the song. It deals with the past, present, and future; its theme embraces the whole of time. A question may be posed as to whether 52:13–15 is a conclusion to 52:1–12, which deals with the deliverance of Israel, a transition from 52:1–12 to chapter 53, or a part of chapter 53, serving as the introduction. Although the three verses build upon 52:1–12, they are best regarded as the introduction to the following chapter, the first of five stanzas in the final Servant Song (52:13–53:12)." (Edward J. Young, *A Commentary On Isaiah*, p. 434).
- B. The Servant will be "exalted and extolled and be very high" (Isa. 52:13), which speaks of three stages of His exaltation:
1. Resurrection (Rom. 1:3–4).
 2. Ascension (Acts 1:6–11).
 3. Seated at the right hand of God (cf. Acts 2:33; Heb. 1:3).
- C. "His visage was marred more than any man" (Isa. 52:14).
1. Pilate ordered Christ to be scourged (Matt. 27:26).
 - a) Christ was not whipped, flogged or striped—He was scourged!
 - b) The Romans called it "halfway death."
 - c) A scourging could only be administered by a trained Roman "lictor."
 2. Christ was stripped of all clothing and His hands tied above His head.
 - a) The *flagellum* was a leather whip made up with thongs of leather.
 - b) Each strip had a piece of bone or lead tied to the ends so it would cut deeper into the flesh—the Romans did not have a limit.
 - c) Josephus speaks of a man named Ananus who was "whipped until his bones were bare."
 - d) Eusebius speaks of a martyr in Smyrna who was scourged until "the deepest veins and arteries were exposed, and even the inner organs of the body were seen."
 3. "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." (Isa. 53:5).
 - a) The soldiers hit Him and smote Him with the a reed, which served as a mock scepter (Matt. 27:27–31).
 - b) His thorn crowned brow caused His features to be hidden.
 - c) "I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me." (Psa. 22:17).
 4. The servant will not remain in humiliation (Phil. 2:9–11; Acts 3:13, 26).

- D. He would “sprinkle” many nations (Isa. 52:15).
1. This is a technical word used of the priests (cf. Lev. 14:7a; 14:6; 8:11).
 2. The purpose of sprinkling was not decontamination, but to obtain ritual purity; hence, the one who does the sprinkling had to be pure.
- E. Men would entirely misjudge Him (Isa. 53:2).
1. There was no physical beauty that drew others to Him.
 2. Men hid their face from Him—they regarded Him as nothing.
- F. “We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4).
1. They looked upon His sufferings as the punishment for His own sins.
 2. The reason for His sufferings is *our sins* (Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:21–24)!
- G. The words “wounded” and “bruised” (Isa. 53:5) are the strongest terms to describe a violent and agonizing death.
1. There is a stress on the “our” in both statements.
 2. His “stripes” (lit. “bruise”) are mentioned in 1 Peter 2:24.
 3. “Crucifixion was a Roman, not a Jewish, form of punishment. It was usually preceded by scourging, which, carried out thoroughly, left the body a mass of swollen and bloody flesh ... All who cared to witness the horrible spectacle were free to do so; the Romans, who thought it necessary to rule by terror, chose, for capital offenses by other than Roman citizens, what Cicero called ‘the most cruel and hideous of tortures.’ The offender’s hands and feet were bound (seldom nailed) to the wood; a projecting block supported the backbone or the feet; unless mercifully killed, the victim would linger there for two or three days, suffering the agony of immobility, unable to brush away the insects that fed upon his naked flesh, and slowly losing strength until the heart failed and brought an end. Even the Romans sometimes pitied the victim, and offered him a stupefying drink.” (Will Durant, *Caesar And Christ*, p. 572).
 - a) The Roman cross was shaped like a capital “T.”
 - b) The crossbeam (*patibulum*) weighed about 100 pounds—it was tied across His shoulders and He was led out through the Via Dolorosa.
 4. The procession with Christ and the two thieves was led by a Roman Centurion towards the place of the crucifixion.
 - a) “He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation?” (Isa. 53:8).
 - b) Despite His efforts to walk erect He falls and rough wood gouges His body, and the bleeding continues.
 - c) The Roman Centurion compels Simon to carry the cross part of the 650 yards from the Fortress Antonia to Calvary (Luke 23:26).
 - d) “And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.’” (Luke 23:27–28).
 5. At Golgotha, the “place of the skull,” Jesus is thrown back onto the rough wood and spikes are driven into His hands.
 - a) The cross beam is lifted up carefully.
 - b) His left foot is pressed back against the right and a nail is driven in.
 - c) “On a hill far away, stood an old, rugged cross...”

- H. Notice His voluntary endurance (Isa. 53:7–9).
 - 1. The scene passes to the unrighteous judicial verdict passed upon Him, and from there to the cross on Calvary.
 - 2. No one would “declare His generation.”
- I. “They made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death” (Isa. 53:9) refers to the intention of the government to give Him a state burial, but Joseph of Arimathea was granted His body (Matt. 27:57).
- J. The Lord was pleased with His suffering (Isa. 53:10–12; cf. John 10:15–18).
 - 1. “He shall see His seed” (Isa. 53:10; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12–16).
 - 2. Fulfilled in Christ (Acts 2:29–36).

Conclusion

- I. Why did Christ come to this earth in the form of a man? (Heb. 2:14–18)
- II. Final thoughts of the Lamb (John 1:29; Acts 8:26f; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 12:11).
- III. He is now “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16).
- IV. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9).

Note: This sermon was preached in two parts. Lesson one dealt with the first three points (pages 1 and 2); the second lesson contained the fourth point (pages 3–5).