

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
The Suffering Servant
Isaiah 52 & 53
January 20, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

“Sin has ruined men, ruined women, ruined angels. Sin has occasioned every tear of sorrow, every sigh of grief, every pang of agony. Sin has withered everything that is fair, blasted everything that is good, made bitter everything that is sweet, dried up springs of comfort, rolled far and wide tides of sorrow. Sin has dugged [sic] every grave, built every coffin, woven every shroud, enlarged every cemetery ...that the world has ever seen” (Robert G. Lee, *Heart to Heart*, pg. 65-66).

A. W. Tozer, in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, wrote (93-94): “Everything in the universe is good to the degree that it conforms to the nature of God and evil as it fails to do so.”

We saw five months ago that Isaiah’s first and primary concern for his people was that they were living in sin. 1:2-6: “Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the Lord speaks, “Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master’s manger, *But* Israel does not know, My people do not understand.” Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him. Where will you be stricken again, As you continue in *your* rebellion? The whole head is sick And the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head There is nothing sound in it, *Only* bruises, welts and raw wounds, Not pressed out or bandaged, Nor softened with oil.”

Isaiah has emphasized the problem throughout his preaching. These are statistics I gave you five months ago when we began studying Isaiah’s writings: “sinful” (21) and “weighed down with iniquity” (30) as well as “evil doers” (22). Incidentally, the designation “Holy One” is found *twenty-five times* in Isaiah; 6 times outside of Isaiah. Why? Because Israel’s sins offended the *holy* nature of God. Sinful man cannot stand in the holy presence of God. “There can be no greater mistake than to minimize the sinful condition of mankind in our Christian preaching and activity” (Young, 47).

In Isaiah 52 and (primarily) 53, Isaiah finally gets to the solution for sin. Sin must be punished. Everyone knows that. Even people who do not believe in the death penalty believe murderers should be punished in some way - maybe life in prison, maybe only a few years in prison but punishment must come. We cannot understand the necessity of the punishment of *sin* until we look at the cross. The cross shows us to what extent the punishment of sin cost the God of heaven. Isaiah begins presenting that picture in Isaiah 53. It was the passage that began the Ethiopian treasurer in Acts 8 thinking about Jesus.

Let’s take a look at Isaiah 52 & 53 this evening...

JERUSALEM SET FREE - 52:1-6:

The chapter begins with a positive note, calling on Zion (Jerusalem) to clothe herself in her strength, in beautiful garments because Jerusalem is going to be “the holy city.” Isaiah is the first one to call Jerusalem the “holy city.” The designation is picked up by Daniel (once) and Nehemiah (twice), who lived after Isaiah. The uncircumcised (only occurrence) and unclean (7 times; cf. 6:5; 35:8) people will no longer be in her. Since we’ve seen frequently how the

Gentiles will, in fact, be a part of the new Jerusalem, then this “uncircumcised” has to refer to the *spiritually* uncircumcised, not the physical.

The “beautiful garments” is an allusion to Exodus 28:2, the priestly garments. But in Exodus 19:4-6, God called the *whole* nation to be a “kingdom of priests,” a challenge they had failed to realize. But, holiness is coming! But it will only be by the grace of God and through unity with God that holiness can come. Compare 4:2-3.

In verse 2, Isaiah calls on Zion to pick herself up from the dust of the earth and shake off the chains of the exile.

Jerusalem was sold (vs 3) into exile “for nothing” - that is, it was because of her *sins*, not as a slave. It will be without money also that she is redeemed. Certainly, the redemption refers to the blood of the Son of God as we will see in chapter 53.

In verse 4 and 5, Isaiah recalls some history, in Egypt and the Assyrian invasion. They have howled over the nation of Israel as they have oppressed God’s people and blasphemed the nation of God all day long.

But, when God restores Jerusalem from captivity and, even more so, when God restores her into a holy relationship with Himself, she will know His name. She will know that God is present - “Behold, Me.” It is a call for relationship. “If we cannot escape him in our pride and sin, neither is he absent in our hopelessness. As 7:14 says, he is with us” (Oswalt, 365).

JERUSALEM THE REJOICING - 52:7-12:

Beginning in 40:1 to this point, Isaiah’s message has been about the return of the people to God, pictured in the imagery of the return from exile.

The good news of peace, the good news of happiness, “salvation” immediately will refer to the return from the Babylonian exile, but spiritually and ultimately, it will refer to the renewed, holy relationship with God. God reigning in their hearts, when they return to Jerusalem with humble submission to the will of God. The prophet Nahum picks up this verse and uses it in 1:15. Nahum was a generation after Isaiah. This verse is quoted by Paul in Romans 10:15.

Despite the fact that Israel would have been in exile for 70 years, it is still nevertheless true, “Your God reigns!” O Israel! “Jehovah God reigns.” He has never abdicated His throne.

One other point... the imagery of a messenger is the background to the preacher being called by the Greek term *kerux*, which is a herald, a messenger on behalf of someone higher, with authority. Of course, the verb *kerruso* is to “announce, or proclaim a message.”

Those watchmen who bring this good news, this “Gospel” message, lift up their voices and shout joyfully together. They will see the restoration of Zion by Jehovah God. You can imagine the messenger getting the news that King Cyrus has issued his proclamation that all subjugated peoples - including the Jews - get to return home. That message would be “gospel,” “good news” to the Jews in exile. But it pales in comparison to the “good news” of “salvation” that comes from God.

So, the whole nation is called to break forth and shout joyfully together. Those people who feel like they dwell in a desert, in “waste places” will find comfort from Jehovah God (vs 9). They will find redemption. “Redeem” or “redeemer” is used by Isaiah 25 times.

The Lord God will show the arm of His strength (vs 10) in the sight of all the nations so the whole earth can see the salvation of God. This shows clearly that God's salvation was intended to be available for all the nations.

As Isaiah had done before, in verse 11, he calls on the nation of Israel to keep themselves separate from the Babylonians while they are in exile. They are to keep themselves pure until they return from exile. This verse is quoted by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:17. The idea of separating ourselves from the sin and evil in the world is not a NT principle.

They will not go out in haste; they will not go out as fugitives. Just like the Israelites left Egypt with their arms loaded down with gold and silver (Exo. 12:35-36), so God will bring Israel out of exile in Babylon. He will go before them (vs 12) and He will be their rear guard, just as He protected the Israelites coming out of Egypt by covering them with clouds.

Now, just like today, people want to pull the promises of material blessings out of the Bible and ignore the spiritual message, it is easy to see the Jews returning from exile to Palestine focusing on the physical imagery and promises of material restoration and ignoring the spiritual message to them. But Isaiah draws their attention to that spiritual message in verse 13ff.

THE SERVANT'S WISDOM AND EXALTED STATUS - 52:13:

52:13 really should be attached to chapter 53. It is basically poetry with five stanzas of three verses each.

Again, we are given a picture of the Servant, a servant now who is not the nation of Israel itself. This is the Israelite *par excellence*. He will prosper. This is the final poem about the Servant of the Lord.

He will be high and lifted up, greatly exalted by Jehovah God, glorified in a way that mankind itself simply cannot be due to sin. The phrase "high and lifted up" is used by Isaiah four times; the other three are talking about Jehovah God. See Philippians 2:5-11.

THE SERVANT'S APPEARANCE - 52:14:

Just as many were astonished at the nation of Israel, going from the golden age of Kings David and Solomon to being poor exiles in Babylon, so they will be astonished at the appearance of the Servant of the Lord. His appearance will be marred. Back in 50:6-7, Isaiah had said about the Servant: "I gave My back to those who strike *Me*, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. For the Lord God helps *Me*, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed."

"Isaiah's point would be that just as many were appalled at Israel's disfigured appearance in the exile, so the servant's appearance was marred as well" (Beyer, 205). Israel was marred by the exile due to her sins; the Servant of the Lord will be marred by the people *on behalf* of their sins.

THE SERVANT AND THE NATIONS - 52:15:

He will "sprinkle" the nations. The verb "sprinkle" is used 24 times in the OT and its "primary significance derives from its reference to 'blood' sprinkling" for ritual purity (*TWOT*; II:566). This portrays the Servant of the Lord as a priest and He is sprinkling blood of the sacrifice on the kings of the earth to forgive their sins. This connection between the Servant of the Lord and the guilt offering sacrifice is strengthened by the reference to the Servant as an

“offering” in 53:10. Of course, the blood that will be sprinkled will not be the blood of bulls or goats but His own blood (Hebrews 10).

“Kings” - likely a reference to Gentiles (49:7) - will shut their mouths in astonishment at what the Servant is going to accomplish. They will see and understand things that they had not even imagined. This is a total contrast to the spiritual blindness and deafness that Israel had, in 6:9-10. Paul uses this passage in Romans 15:21.

This Servant of the Lord is greatly exalted, but marred beyond recognition; yet, He will sprinkle the kings of the earth for purification. Is it no wonder that this text arrested the attention of the Ethiopian eunuch?

THE STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE IN THE SERVANT - 53:1:

So, Isaiah asks the question: “Who has believed our message?” The kings shut their mouths in astonishment. They can’t believe the message. Can the Jews believe it?

Can they believe that the Servant *is* the arm of the Lord? In 52:10, Isaiah says that the Lord bared His arm. Here, Isaiah asks to whom has this arm of the Lord been revealed? His own people had a hard time grasping His identity. “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” (Matt. 13:55-56). In John’s Gospel, the Jews are stumped: “Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” (John 7:41-42)...

Paul quotes verse 1 in Romans 10:16. Jesus also quotes this verse in John 12:38, combining it with a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10.

THE SERVANT’S ORDINARY BEGINNINGS AND PLAIN APPEARANCE - 53:2:

Israel simply did not expect the servant to grow up among them as a normal person. That’s how the Jews responded to Jesus.

Jesus did not come appearing as a king nor as a Savior. There was nothing about His physical appearance that drew men to Him.

THE SERVANT FACES DERISION AND REJECTION - 53:3:

How did His own receive Him? Back in 49:7, Isaiah said that His nation despised Him, abhorred Him. Here, He is despised and forsaken by men. He was a man weighed down with sorrows and he knew about grief. So much was this true that men hid their faces from Him. He was despised and man did not give Him any esteem.

“The servant’s life was marked by sorrow and emotional pain, and he knew suffering and grief well” (Beyer, 206). “Such a one as this can hardly be the one who can set us free from that most pervasive of all human bondages: sin, and all its consequences” (Oswalt, 384).

THE SERVANT’S SUFFERING - 53:4-6:

There are two things that are striking about the suffering endured by this servant. First, He did not suffer for His own sins; it was for the sins of others. Second, this was brought about by the God of heaven, under His guidance and control.

In these three verses, note the number of first person plural possessive pronouns - "our" and "we" and "us." This man suffered, not for Himself, but for others. For Isaiah. For the Jews. For all those who seek righteousness from the Lord.

He bore our griefs. This verb "bore" alludes to the scapegoat from Leviticus 16:22 which carried the sins of the Israelites into the wilderness. Yes, the Servant of the Lord is our "scapegoat," by the grace of God.

He carried our sorrows. Matthew (8:17) quotes this passage and puts a distinctively physical aspect to it: He bore our infirmities and carried away our diseases. The greatest infirmity and worst disease of human nature is the desire to sin and rebel against God.

Yet, observe that this was accomplished by the God of heaven - He was stricken, smitten by God, afflicted. Just as the Jews were in exile, stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God *because* of their sins, so the Servant of the Lord was stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God but *not* for His own sins - for *theirs!*

He was pierced for their transgressions. He was crushed for their iniquities. The act of discipline that would bring "well-being" (Peace) fell on this Servant. By His scourging the Jews will be healed. Peter quotes verse 5 in 1 Peter 2:24.

This people, like sheep, had all gone astray. Notice that Isaiah does not say we were "born" astray, as if we were born in sin, sinners from birth. Rather, we have "gone astray," our behavior not measuring up to God's standards. But, individually, "each of us have turned to his own way." Selfishness. Self-centeredness. That describes man. But the Lord caused the iniquity of all of us to fall on Him.

"A lamb cannot die in a human's place, but a perfect human could; and if that human is also God, he could die for every human's sin (Heb. 9:11-14)" (Oswalt, 385).

We call this sacrifice "vicarious." It means that He was punished *in our place*. How can you not read and meditate on these words and not be struck by the power of God's grace and the power of Christ's sacrifice?

THE SERVANT'S DEATH - 53:7-9:

The Servant goes quietly to the slaughter - 53:7:

Speaking of sheep, the Servant was oppressed and afflicted but He did not grumble or complain or seek a different path. Like a Lamb led to the slaughter, He did not open His mouth. Remember 42:2.

The Servant dies for God's people - 53:8:

Through oppression and judgment, He was taken away from the land of the living. He died, cut off out of the land of the living, on behalf of God's people. For their "transgression," to whom the stroke was due - fell on Him.

The Servant dies innocent - 53:9:

In His grave, He was numbered with the wicked men (The Hebrew word is plural). Yet, in His death, He was with the rich (The Hebrew word is singular.) - clearly a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross between two thieves but laid to rest in a tomb of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57, 60; Mark 15:43).

Most criminals were either left to the scavenging birds or buried in mass graves or even burned. But this man was laid with the rich - why? Because He had done no violence nor was

any deceit found in His mouth. Here is a clear reference to the innocence of the Servant of the Lord. He did not die for His own sins. He died for the sins of others. "Where has such a person ever lived on the face of the earth?" (Oswalt, 396-397).

THE SERVANT'S TRIUMPH - 53:10-12:

God made the servant a guilt offering - 53:10:

This whole affair was God's plan. God crushed His Servant. God put His Servant to grief. God rendered His Servant as a "guilt offering" (Leviticus 5). But He will have offspring, spiritual offspring. His days would be prolonged - by the resurrection from the dead. The good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in the Servant's hand.

"Suffering great pain, being pierced and beaten, suffering for others' failures, and bearing the guilt that belongs to others may not sound like a successful life; but if this pleases God and it is his will, a true servant will lay down his life for others" (Smith, 460).

The Servant will see His descendants - 53:10-11:

The offering of the Servant would satisfy the holy requirements of the holy God and He would be satisfied. The "Righteous One," the Servant of the Lord, will "justify" many. The verb "justify" comes from the same Hebrew word as "Righteous One." It would be better in translating to keep the repetition here: "The Righteous One will make many righteous." "Righteous" - 68 times in Isaiah. Here is where it is obtained. He will bear their iniquities.

The Servant receives God's reward - 53:12:

The Servant, because of His faithful obedience unto death, will receive a portion with the great by the hand of God. He will enjoy the booty of the win against death. He poured out Himself to death. He was numbered with the transgressors and bore the sins of many. Yet, He interceded on their behalf. Sins. Transgressions. Iniquities. We have a Savior. Thank God for that.

Everything before Isaiah 53 anticipated it. Everything that comes after Isaiah 53 will presume it. Salvation will be available. Righteousness can be a reality. Holiness will be a garment worn by God's people in the future.

Next week:
Celebrating the Return
Isaiah 54-56