

The Gospel According to Isaiah

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Introduction

Isaiah Sermon Series: This is the last in our series “The Gospel According to Isaiah.” If you missed the previous messages, you can see them at redemptionheights.org/sermons. This message covers the last and most famous “Servant Song” from Isaiah. “Indeed, it may, in my opinion, be called the most important passage of the OT, because it is more frequently quoted in the NT than any other OT passage” (Brian Russell).¹

I Love It When a Plan Comes Together: A-Team. All the promises and plans of God for the redemption of his people come together in this prophecy. Heist movie (unplanned plan).

Getting the Big Picture: Why do we preach the OT? Why on this day of all days, the high holy holiday of Christianity are we finishing a series from the Hebrew Bible? (1) It doesn't seem wise to skip the largest part of your Bible. (2) It doesn't seem very Christian to skip the part of the Bible that were the Scriptures of Jesus and the apostles. “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). The central (i.e., **most important**) points of the gospel (i.e., death, burial, and resurrection) are **according to the Scriptures**. (3) But also, the good news of the gospel **really is there!**

- I read where a Sunday School teacher was teaching the story of Ezekiel and the dry bones (a quite fantastic and strange OT story) to her young students. She asked, “Why do we have the story of Ezekiel and the dry bones in our Bibles?”
 - Kid 1: “To show God's power.”
 - Kid 2: “Because God can put things back together again.”
 - Kid 3: “To show God has the power to make dead things come to life.”
 - Kid 4: “Wait! That's like Jesus on the cross!”
- These kids get it. These OT stories are the promises of redemption to which the NT shows the fulfillment. And none, perhaps, is more clear than our passage today.
 - “If there is any one passage in the OT which seems to the Christian heart to be a prophecy of the redeeming work of Christ, it is [this] matchless [poem]” (J. Gresham Machen).
- In fact, Isaiah 53 so encapsulates the gospel that I would read it in *preference* to NT passages in describing the atonement.

The Core of the Gospel: Our redemption and resurrection is accomplished through the brutal suffering and sacrificial death of Jesus. It is precisely his suffering and his death in our place that shows us the gospel and highlights exactly what makes it good news.

¹ Luke 22:37, John 12:38, Acts 8:26-35, Rom 10:16, 15:21, 1 Pet 2:21-25

In it we see the gospel, what really makes it good news (for sinners).

Just listen to these powerful words of the Lord:

^{52:13} Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. ¹⁴ As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind— ¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. ^{53:1} Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ 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. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

1. A Suffering Servant

Our Savior Suffers: We see in this prophecy, confirmed by Jesus, that our savior is a **suffering servant**. ¹⁴... his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind... ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... ⁵... he was pierced... he was crushed... ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted...

- We have a God who suffers. The crucifixion of Jesus was brutal. One scholar explained that crucifixion was designed to keep the victim alive in as much pain as possible for as long as possible without letting them slip into shock. It “involved dizziness, cramp, thirst, sleeplessness, hunger, fever, humiliation, shame, piercing wounds, ripped tendons, and more. But, even beyond that, the cumulative effect of the physical *and* spiritual suffering (e.g., bear their iniquities). E.g., have you ever done something wrong and felt terrible about it. Imagine the spiritual weight of every person and ever sin of all time.

Misunderstood: Because Jesus is a suffering savior that means he is a **misunderstood messiah**. ¹⁴ As many were astonished at you... he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him... ^{53:1} Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?... ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Misunderstood as the savior because no one could imagine that the messiah would suffer and die.

- Jesus didn't trick or rig the game (e.g., cheating on the test isn't real knowledge; it doesn't help to cheat through medical school). He didn't "win" by attractiveness, eloquence, wealth, or celebrity status (and we shouldn't expect to succeed by these means either).
- He didn't compromise the plan of God or trick people into following him. Even when crowds gathered he would say hard truths that would cause them to scatter. He told the truth. There was no compromise.
- Why were they astonished (parenthetical explanation)? Is Jesus suffering evidence of his disobedience? Punishment from God?
- "We don't struggle with the Lord being our shepherd as much as we struggle with the shepherd being our Lord" (Robert Smith). Salvation of the Lord without the path of the Lord.

Identifies With You: Jesus, in his perfect humanity, identifies with us. He knew temptation, poverty, weariness, rejection, sorrow, ridicule, and pain. When we suffer, which we all have, are, or will, we can run to our God who understands from the depths of his soul. Jesus understands your suffering. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows

- In times of suffering, run to Jesus!
- There is a painful beauty in the suffering of Jesus because out of his pain we have salvation.

2. A Perfect Substitute

Atonement: The issue at the core of our sin problem is how to we make it right? How can we be united go God after our relationship has been severed? How can we reconciled? How can our sin debt be paid? This is the question of **atonement**. How can our sin be **atoned** for? Sin has a penalty. This is the central issue on the Day of Atonement (duh) when the sins of the people are atoned by sacrifice once a year. It is also the story of Passover when the people of God remember that God *passed his judgment over them* because of the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their house.

- "... The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek 18:4b).
- "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom 5:12).
- "For the wages of sin is death..." (Rom 6:23a).

How Are Our Sins Atoned For: “Jesus died for our sins” (an obvious statement, but what does that mean?). In the Middle Ages Anselm of Canterbury provided a definitive interpretation of atonement. The question for him (*Cur Deus Homo*), was how both God’s love and God’s justice can be interpreted in light of the serious reality of human sin. He explained that we have incurred an infinite debt through our sin and CANNOT pay it back. God wants his creatures to flourish but he can’t just “let things slide.” Satisfaction had to be made for the sake of God’s honor. So God offered God’s own self, through Jesus, as a perfect sacrifice to make payment for the human offense of sin. The crucifixion of Jesus, therefore, sets humankind free from sin.

- You and I owe a debt we cannot pay (Current US National Debt, \$23.3 trillion. 1 trillion is 1000 billions. 1 trillion seconds is over 30,000 years).

Why is Jesus’ Death Necessary?: Only Jesus’ substitutionary death preserves justice and mercy. Which would you rather live in (1) a world without justice or (2) a world without mercy?

- Sin against an infinitely holy God demands the penalty of death. You see, we think someone can just snap their fingers and forgive but God is perfect and sin is infinitely offensive to him. He is the lawmaker, if he overlooked the consequences of breaking the law then justice would be perverted. “We can overlook evil and it does not matter too much, but God is not like that. If God overlooks evil, it is as good as saying that evil does not matter; it is of no consequence” (Russell).
- “The problem of forgiveness is... the inevitable collision between divine perfection and human rebellion, between God as He is and us as we are... Although ‘God is love,’ we have to remember that His love is ‘holy love,’ **love which yearns over sinners while at the same time refusing to condone their sin.** How, then, [can] God [show] His love in forgiving sinners without compromising His holiness, and His holiness in judging sinners without [ruining] His love?... At the cross in holy love God through Christ paid the full penalty of our disobedience Himself. He bore the judgment we deserve in order to bring us the forgiveness we do not deserve. On the cross divine mercy and justice were equally expressed and eternally reconciled. God’s holy love was satisfied” (Stott).

A Different Sacrifice: But here’s the thing: “All the world’s top experts never thought of removing our guilt this way. That the Servant of the Lord would judge our evil by bearing it Himself in His own sufferings” (Ortlund). The Israelites were used to sacrifices for sins but these sacrifices were inefficient, they didn’t last. Their effect was not permanent. They, at best, were placeholders of forgiveness awaiting something more permanent. They needed a **different kind of sacrifice.**

- “But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26).
- For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... And by that will we

have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:1-4, 10, 14).

- Any choice to forgive means you agree to absorb a cost. Say you slander me—lie about me and ruin my reputation. How can I respond? Well, I could respond in kind—do whatever I can to hurt your reputation. And that would make me feel a little better, because justice had been served. I made you take the pain you caused me. But, **if I choose to forgive you**, to not respond in kind, what happened to the pain? I absorbed it. I took it. **True forgiveness is always costly**. To forgive means you absorb in yourself the pain caused by someone else's sin. On the cross, **God absorbed the sting of your sin**.

In My Place: Jesus died in your place. Surely he has [carried] **our** griefs and carried **our** sorrows...⁵ But he was pierced for **our** transgressions; he was crushed for **our** iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed...¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

- "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).
- "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).
- "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'" (Gal 3:13).
- Your rebellion, lies, wicked thoughts, hypocrisies, selfishness, pride, sexual immorality, greed, etc. Jesus took each of those sins on himself. He paid the price you should have paid. **He didn't merely die for you, he died instead of you**.
- Salvation is the free gift to all who put their trust in Jesus. The gospel in four words: Jesus in my place.

Assurance: The grounds of our acceptance and assurance before God is that another has made us acceptable—Jesus Christ.

- Two Jews on the eve of Passover. One is confident, one is scared. Death doesn't pass over on the ground of the intensity or clarity of the faith exercised but on the ground of the blood of the lamb.
- Buddha's last words were, "Strive without ceasing." Jesus did all of the striving for us so we can rest in him.

Invitation: Jesus invites you to find life in him (only in him). This is a truth to be believed/trusted. Knowing that Jesus died in your place does not automatically absolve you. This truth must be accepted by faith. You have to admit you are a sinner, in need of the cross.⁶ 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.

3. A Willing Sacrifice

God's Plan: ^{52:13} Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted... ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. The plan of God was the salvation of many and the exaltation of his son through his death.

Voluntary Submission: The servant knows the penalty that must be paid and willingly pays it. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Jesus knows what he is getting into. The trial is a sham. Justice is perverted from a human perspective. But, never think that this is against the will of Jesus. He is not merely the collateral damage of human injustice. He willingly gives his life. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11). The Father and the Son willingly and lovingly act together through the cross to save sinners. Jesus' execution was unjust but it wasn't an accident

Resurrection: The substitutionary atonement is followed by the victorious resurrection. The servant will be exalted. He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted... the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand... ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.

- "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11)
- "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet 2:24).
- "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (1 Pet 3:18).
- "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5).
- "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:11).
- Jesus not only secures your forgiveness through his death but your new life through his resurrection.

Conclusion – So What?

- Do you need new life? Holy week provides a stunning backdrop for whatever suffering you are experiencing. It is a story that gives great hope. "In your moments of suffering,

look at Jesus' resurrection as you wait for your own." Jesus is resurrected which guarantees our resurrection (kinda the point of 1 Corinthians 15).

- But sometimes we're like those who were astonished, who misunderstood Jesus' death.
- Learning and living are not the same. The challenge is to make what you learn affect how you live. Why are we constantly talking about the gospel, remembering the work of God? Because obedience falters when memory fails. But by meditating on who we are in Christ we are able to live in the new life offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- By placing your faith in Jesus you can be united to him in his death and resurrection.
- Pregnancy and Relationship with God
 - "The child in my womb right now is truly alive, even though his life is utterly contingent on mine. He moves freely within my womb. But he does not control his location: where I go, he goes. Likewise, I am truly alive and truly free not independently from Jesus but enfolded in him. And just as escaping from me right now would mean not life to my child but death, so escaping from Christ would mean not freedom and life to me but a brief writhing before stillness. Enclosed in my body, dependent on my blood, protected by my immunity, and housed in my love, my son is, in a tangible sense, united with me. Because I trust in Jesus, I am similarly dependent on him. Where Jesus goes, I go. If he lives, I live. He died my death and took my punishment. He is my resurrection and my life" (Rebecca McLoughlin, *Confronting Christianity*).
- "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).
- Turn to Christ and live.