

Christmas from Isaiah - Isaiah 52:13-53:12 - The Gospel in the Old Testament

December 22, 2013

Welcome to Faith Church. My name is Kurt, and I am one of the pastors. This Christmas we are in a short series called *Christmas from the Book of Isaiah*. Isaiah is a book in the Old Testament written approximately 700 years before Jesus. What is amazing is God inspired Isaiah to say so much about Jesus hundreds of years before he was born. Isaiah is the second-most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament because it tells us so much about Jesus. This morning, we come to a chapter in Isaiah that is the most quoted chapter of Isaiah in the New Testament. It is probably also the most quoted Old Testament chapters in the New Testament. This morning is all about Jesus but it was written 700 years before he arrived.

For those of you who are new, let me take a moment to bring you up to speed in our series. The second half of Isaiah is prophecy. God inspired Isaiah to write about events 150-plus years into the future. We are not talking about prophecy written with the ambiguity of a fortune cookie or a horoscope, but biblical prophecy gives details about the future with unprecedented details that can only come from God. For example, in Isaiah, we learn it would be Cyrus, King of Persia, that would free the Jews from exile in Babylon. What is impressive is this was written before the Jews went into exile in Babylon. It was written before Cyrus was born. Only God would know the name of the king who would conquer Babylon before he was born.

In the second half of Isaiah there is a mysterious figure that floats in and out of the book. He is called the Servant of the Lord. Earlier in this series we learned the Servant of the Lord will change everything about our relationship with God and one another. Who is this guy? The New Testament is clear that this mysterious servant of the Lord is Jesus. In Isaiah God had Isaiah tell us about him long before he arrived, just like he did with Cyrus. There are four passages of Isaiah that talk about this mysterious Servant of the Lord. In previous weeks, we studied the first three. This morning we come to the fourth and final one. It is by far the most descriptive about Jesus in the bunch.

We have a lot of text to cover so we will jump right in. I don't have a snappy outline. We will just read straight through and make observations as we go. Remember this is Hebrew poetry. It is not the repair manual for your laundry machine so it reads like poetry and the words are a little looser, but the meaning is still clear.

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. Isaiah 52:13 (ESV)

We see right off the bat who this is talking about, the Servant of the Lord. This mysterious servant would act wisely. What does that mean? The Hebrew word for *wisely* can mean *prosper*. It means to succeed. God's servant, Jesus, would be a raging success. He would be high, lifted up and exalted. God's servant, Jesus, would be a raging success and would be honored because of it. Everyone would look up to him. God would give him honor. This sounds exciting until we get to the next verse where things take a weird twist.

As many were astonished at you — his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind... Isaiah 52:14 (ESV)

Apparently the servant's greatness would involve suffering, extreme suffering. Many were going to be shocked at Jesus, God's servant, because his appearance would be so disfigured he would be beyond semblance, his form beyond the children of mankind. If you know the life of Christ, you know that before he died, his beard was pulled out, and he was hit in the face. He was whipped with a cat-o-nine tails, tearing the flesh off his back. If you have seen the movie, "The Passion" by Mel Gibson, you have an idea of how whipped and bloodied Jesus was before the cross. Most people do not realize that the whipped and beaten Jesus in Mel Gibson's movie, with cuts and blood over his body, is not an accurate picture of what Jesus looked like.

Read Isaiah a little closer. It says when people looked at Jesus before he died, they were astonished. The disfigurement he endured was so bad that it didn't leave people questioning his identity, Jesus was unrecognizable as a human being. People looked at Jesus after his beatings before his crucifixion and didn't say, "Who is that?" They said, "What is that?" He didn't even look like a human being. That was a new level of brutality.

The Gospel writers tell us what happened to Jesus but they spare us the gory details of the level of disfigurement he endured. This prophecy of Isaiah gives us those details, details we don't find in the Gospels.

...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. Isaiah 52:15 (ESV)

Here is another verse that sounds weird. When we think of sprinkle, we think of watering the lawn in the summer. Is this Jesus the lawn boy? No.

This comes out of the Old Testament sacrificial system where after an animal was sacrificed, the priest took a stalk of hyssop, dipped it in the blood of the animal that was sacrificed and flung the blood over the people. By sprinkling the blood of the dead animal over the people they were made symbolically clean. It is by the blood of Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, that people from all over the world will be made literally clean and free of sin.

When this happens, world rulers will be speechless. It was the death of a man on a cross that completely changed the world and brought people from all over the world back to God. Nobody would have guessed it.

These three verses give us a brief overview of Jesus. Jesus would be incredibly successful and rewarded by God because of it. He would be successful through suffering. His suffering would involve beating and disfigurement to the point he was unrecognizable as a human being. Through his death he would purify people from all over the world from their sins, bringing people back to God, leaving the rulers of the world speechless on how he did it.

Now we get into the details of how this would happen.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Isaiah 53:1 (ESV)

Isaiah said, "What I am about to say is literally unbelievable. It is the kind of a story you tell your friends and they just won't believe it is true."

To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? This is interesting to think about. Psalm 8:3 tells us God made the universe with his finger. The entire

universe is nothing more than God's finger painting. Exodus 13:3 tells us he freed the Israelites from Egypt with the palm of his hand. Here God revealed his entire arm. God has a set of pipes. God's mighty power would be revealed but it was not what they would expect.

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. Isaiah 53:2 (ESV)

The Servant of the Lord grew up just like another plant in the garden, just like another blade of grass in your lawn. This summer, when you are mowing your lawn and you see how indistinguishable one piece of grass is from another, remember that is how Jesus looked when he came, just like another blade of grass in the lawn.

Jesus had no beauty about him, nothing desirable about him. We often think of Jesus as perfect. He is perfect. We think perfect means the perfect complexion, the perfect body, the perfect look about him and he would have been a great model for Abercrombie and Fitch. That wasn't the way Jesus looked. He looked like an ordinary guy, just another blade of grass in the lawn. You couldn't pick him out in a crowd. In Michelangelo's painting of Jesus with his disciples at the Last Supper everybody is looking at Jesus because he was glowing. Jesus didn't glow. There was nothing about him that drew people to him. He wasn't attractive. He was an ordinary guy.

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. Isaiah 53:3 (ESV)

Just as Jesus was nothing special in his physical appearance, he was nothing special socially. In fact, he was socially rejected. He was an outcast. He understands what it is like to be an outsider, to not be popular. He understands what it is like to have people see you, turn their heads and walk away. Jesus understands what it is like to be rejected. Jesus understands grief. He understands suffering. He understands rejection. He understands being looked down upon. He experienced it.

Now we come to the center of this song. In Hebrew, the center of a song is the most important part of a song. In the center of the song we find what the Servant of the Lord came to do. Here is the gospel message in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord, came to save us. He came to take the punishment for sin we deserve.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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. Isaiah 53:4–5 (ESV)

If you are circling a word, I want you to circle the word “our.” Jesus died in our places for our sins. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. All of the things we regret, all of the things that burden us down and break our hearts, he put upon himself.

The funny part is that while he was dying for us, carrying our sorrows and griefs, people looked at him as someone God was punishing for his own sins. The Jews figured his brutal flogging and crucifixion was God’s way of punishing Jesus with a horrible death because he claimed to be the son of God. In reality,

Jesus was dying a horrible death for the very ones who were mocking him. He was dying for us.

He was pierced for our transgressions. What a beautiful picture of the cross. The nails driven through his palms and feet were for our sins, not his sin.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The word crushed means crushed under a burden. When he took our sins upon himself, it was as if he was a grape that was run over on the highway and completely flattened by our sins. He took our sins upon himself willingly.

Everything that happened to Jesus was not for his sin, it was for our sin.s It is the punishment we deserve. The Servant of the Lord would die in our places for our sins.

His punishment brought us peace. It is by his wounds we are healed. His suffering was our healing. This is the gospel: Jesus Christ dying in our place for our sin. Jesus taking the sufferings we deserve. We are forgiven of our sin sby trusting in what Jesus has done for us.

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 53:6 (ESV)

Here we have the definition of sin. Sheep are animals that don't want to listen. They want to do their own thing and go their own way. That is what we are like. God gives us his law but we go our own way. The essence of sin is saying, "I want to do things my way. God, you may have given me my life but you aren't in charge of my life. I am in charge and I use you only on a consultant basis, otherwise I am living for me."

If it feels like a good idea to not tell the whole truth, that works for me. If it feels like a good idea to leave my marriage even though God says, “I hate divorce,” that works for me. Sin is telling God “I want to live life my way, not your way,” and because of our sin, we deserve an eternity separated from God and an eternity of God’s wrath.

The good news is God loves us. He poured out his wrath on his own son, the Servant of the Lord, Jesus. Jesus died in our places for our sins. This is the gospel in the Old Testament. God is telling us what Jesus would do hundreds of years before he came.

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. Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)

Most animals will fight to avoid dying. Apparently sheep just go with the flow. That was Jesus. He didn’t fight. He didn’t argue. He didn’t swear. When he was in front of Pilate, he said nothing. As he was whipped he was silent. As he was crucified he held in his pain.

That stretches my mind to think Jesus was beaten to the point that he didn’t look human but he kept his mouth shut and endured it. How could he keep silent?

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. Matthew 15:18 (ESV)

When we are under stress, what comes out of our mouths is the selfishness, the sinfulness and the sinfulness of our hearts. We are pretty good at masking it until someone cuts us off in traffic or we hit our thumbs with a hammer. Then we let it all come out, like popping a balloon with a pin. The

selfishness, sinfulness and filthiness of our hearts bursts out in the open for all to see.

Jesus suffered in silence because there was no evil in his heart. This is incredible evidence of his sinless perfection.

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? Isaiah 53:8 (ESV)

This is talking about Jesus' kids. The word generation is talking about his family. How could Christ have a family? First, he was not married. Second, he died on a cross. How could he have kids?

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. Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

This is an amazing detail. In the gospel of Luke, we learn Jesus was crucified with two criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. He hung between them, just as we see prophetically foretold.

After Christ died, the gospels tell us a rich man, named Joseph of Arimathea, asked for Jesus' body and had him buried in his own tomb. This was highly unusual. A condemned criminal's body was taken down from the cross and not given a proper burial. A criminal's body was thrown in the town garbage dump. This was a highly unusual twist to anyone's death and it was described in Isaiah hundreds of years before it happened.

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. Isaiah 53:10 (ESV)

It was God's the Father's will to crush Jesus. Jesus suffered and died by the plan of God the Father. Nothing happened to Jesus that was beyond God the Father's will.

...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Acts 2:23 (ESV)

Jesus died as an offering for guilt. The Gospel of John talks about Jesus being the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world. Jesus' soul, his person, is the once-for-all offering for sin.

Now it gets interesting. The Servant of the Lord, Jesus, would die as a once-for-all offering for guilt and sin, but when you are dead, you are dead. When you are dead, you are gone. The Servant of the Lord would live again even though he died. It doesn't say resurrection, but what other option do we have other than a resurrection? The text says the servant of the Lord would prolong his days.

Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, would see his offspring. That means Jesus would have many children. That isn't talking physical birth, that is talking spiritual rebirth. Many people will trust in Jesus as their savior and Lord.

Jesus would be raised from the dead and the one who was rejected and despised would be the one who many turn to and follow.

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. Isaiah 53:11 (ESV)

After the anguish of death on the cross, the anguish of being separated from God the Father, Jesus would see how his death conquered Satan, sin and judgment, and he would be thrilled. It is like a woman giving birth. There is a lot

of pain in the process, but once the child is born, there is incredible joy. There is a great satisfaction. Jesus would have great satisfaction because he freed us from the power of sin and penalty of sin.

Many people, countless people, will be made right before God from what Jesus has done for them on the cross. Can't you see Jesus fulfilling all this?

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. Isaiah 53:12 (ESV)

Because of what Jesus did, he is considered a conquering hero. As a result of Jesus' victory, God the Father will give him a portion with the many. The Hebrew word *many* can also be translated *great*. Jesus ranks as somebody who deserves the rewards of the great hero because he willingly went to his death, bearing our sins to bring us back to God.

Conclusion

As I studied this last servant song, here is what stood out to me.

1. **Jesus's life was vividly described 700 years before it happened.** How could this kind of description of Jesus' life be given 700 years before if God wasn't behind it, if God wasn't the one inspiring Isaiah on what to say? In a day when the Bible is questioned as the Word of God, this prophetic passage from Isaiah about Jesus gives us ample reason to trust the Bible as the Word of God.
2. **Jesus was always God's plan to save us.** Jesus has been, and will always be, God's one complete plan to save us. Jesus takes all of our sins upon himself, he gives us all of his righteous and new hearts to go with it when we

ask him to be in charge of our lives. Jesus was not an afterthought of God. He was always plan No. 1.

3. **God loves us more than we can imagine.** Christmas can be one of the most depressing times of the year. With loved ones who have died and family out of town, Christmas can be hard. This Christmas, look at Isaiah 52-53 and see something we often miss. When Jesus came in Bethlehem, he came to die in our places, for our sins. He came to be beaten beyond recognition for us. He was separated from his father for us. After he died and rose from the dead conquering Satan, sin and death, he looked with satisfaction upon what he had done because he saved us. My friends, it is written between each line. God loves you! That is not because we deserve it. We are a bunch of misfits and fools, but God, beyond our wildest dreams, has chosen to love us through Jesus. That makes Christmas worth celebrating. It turns the most depressing time of year into the best time of year. No matter what you may feel this morning. Isaiah 52-53 tells us what we know is true. God loves us so much that he sent his son to take away all of our sin, griefs and sorrows.



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