

Text: Isa 53.1-9

In 2013, our Christmas series was just on Isaiah 53. I have my study file from that time which comes to 27 pages of notes. This time I've added another 13 pages and I'm not finished yet.

Consequently, I've read and studied way more on this passage than I can possibly say in the two messages I've allotted to it this year.

Let's read the passage and notice a few things so you can see how I plan to deal with this beautiful Song.

Read Isa 52.13-53.12

One of the things we have noticed in reading these Old Testament poems is that the prophet gives voice to various speakers in the Songs.

The last Song, Isa 50, had the Servant himself speaking throughout.

Notice 52.13: "My servant will prosper" and **53.11**, "My Servant, will justify the many" — who is speaking here? **The Father**

Notice 53.1: "Who has believed our message?" — who is speaking here?

Interpretations vary on this point. The speakers are looking back, they are reporting something to us.

They confess they did not know nor understand what they saw when the Servant came.

Consequently, the best identification of the speakers here is what we might call "the believing remnant."

In Zech 12.10, God prophesies that on the Day of the Lord, at the Lord's return, a change will come over the remnant of Israel.

Zech 12.10 ¶ "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

This is the believing remnant who will enter the millennial kingdom. The speakers Isaiah imagines is *at least* them.

Besides the believing remnant, there is a remnant of Jewish believers in the church even today. This is *their* testimony as well.

What I propose to do is to pull the middle section out of the passage and talk about what the remnant says about the Servant. Next week we will pick up what God says.

The message of the remnant is vital for everyone today. If you don't see Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, in these lights, he can do *nothing* for you.

Proposition: The suffering of the Servant substitutes for the suffering you deserve.

A couple of preliminary thoughts.

- The voices in this section of the Song are speaking with profound regret. "We missed it." "We didn't get it."

A lot of people today still don't get it. Why do Christians make so much of this Jesus who died 2000 years ago?

- The voices in this section of the Song are spiritually changed. You can change too, if you haven't made the Servant your Lord and God already.

I. Our attitude to his person (1-3)

A. The missed message (1)

1. The word message can be taken in one of two ways

- a. The message the speakers are giving
- b. The message the speakers received

That is, "our message" = the one that came to us

2. The expected answers to the questions:

- a. Very few
- b. Hardly any
- c. Maybe no one

B. Hidden in the question is the meaning of the message: "the arm of the Lord" (1b)

1. The "arm of the Lord" is a metaphor for God's power in saving his people

2. Israel failed to see the arm of the Lord, even though it was in front of their eyes

In the 1st century, many Jews were looking for their Messiah, but they expected a political leader. When Jesus came, he wasn't what they were looking for.

C. The insignificant appearance (2)

1. Humble beginnings

- a. (tender shoot [sucker], root in the desert)
- b. Jesus in his coming:
 - 1) Born in a Bethlehem manger, to unassuming parents
 - 2) Stigma around his birth — “we were not born of fornication” (the Jews, Jn 8.41)
 - 3) Raised in Nazareth — “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (Nathaniel, Jn 1.46)
 - 4) Humble means and work — “Is not this the carpenter?” (Mk 6.3)

2. Nothing noble or unusual about his appearance

- a. The terms here speak of majesty and nobility
 - 1) “stately form”
 - 2) “majesty”
 - 3) “appearance”
- b. The meaning is “this guy seemed quite ordinary”

Jn 10.33 For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because **You, being a man**, make Yourself out *to be* God

D. Our old estimation of him (3)

1. Notice the word “despised” at the beginning and end of the verse
 - a. In English, a very strong word

b. Hebrew: means at least, “overlooked” or “unworthy” (can lead to contempt in Eng. term)

2. A man with problems

a. When he came preaching and doing mighty deeds, an initial enthusiasm

b. But then he seemed so strange

Jn 6.57-58 “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.⁵⁸ “This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever.”

Jn 6.60 ¶ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?”

Jn 6.66 ¶ As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

c. The authorities grew more and more publicly opposed to him

Jn 7.25 ¶ So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?”

Man of sorrows — who wants to get too close to a guy who the authorities want to kill?

d. Confession: “He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

II. Our misunderstanding of his suffering (4-6)

A. The new understanding (4a)

1. He bore our griefs; he bore our sorrows

Notice the chiasm with verse 3: “sorrows, griefs”

2. Griefs and sorrows are a figure of speech of the effect for the cause (sin is the cause)

3. Our sin he *bore*, our guilt he *carried*

“Sin can be forgiven and forgotten, because it is taken up and carried away.”¹

What a blessing this is to men, who are conscious of their sin and wrongdoing!

B. Yet this confession is one of people lately come to the confession (4b)

1. We thought he suffered for himself
2. We thought God was striking him for his own sins

God *did* strike him — but not for himself

C. Reality: he suffered for us

1. Words of heavy suffering

- a. Pierced
- b. Crushed

“The verbs ‘pierced’ and ‘crushed’ are two of the strongest words in the Hebrew language to describe a violent and painful death.”²

- c. Chastened (disciplined)
- d. Scourged

2. All the suffering was ours

- a. Pierced for **our** transgressions
- b. Crushed for **our** iniquities
- c. Chastening for **our** well-being
- d. His scourging heals **us**

“This shows again that the Servant’s sufferings were not just *with* His people but *for* them.”³

¹ Walter C Kaiser, “1421 נִשְׂרָף,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 601.

² F. Duane Lindsey, “Isaiah’s Songs of the Servant Part 5: The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 (Concluded),” *Bibliotheca Sacra: Dallas Theological Seminary* 140, no. 557 (1983): 24.

³ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Isa 53.5.

3. All this for our *shalom* — “well-being”

D. Confession of our unworthy state (6)

1. We are like wandering sheep

“A simile now reinforces the point just made. Sheep are notoriously shortsighted; they go after the next clump of grass without regard to where their feet may lead them. They are also self-centered; their only thought is how they can satisfy themselves with no concern for the welfare of other sheep. Consequently sheep often get lost. Humans are the same.”⁴

2. Our iniquity fell on him

The remnant sees what they have done: what all men have done.

- Dismissed the Messiah
- Mocked the Messiah
- Yet the Messiah bore the iniquity of us all

Now his suffering makes sense: not for himself, but for everyone else.

III. Our dismissal of his death (7-9)

A. He willingly went to slaughter (7)

1. We are the wandering sheep

2. He was the silent sheep

a. He offered no defense of himself

b. He gave no justification

Consider that the Bible teaches us that he created all there is by the voice of his power. What kind of defense could he have made?

3. He went willingly to death

“Israel protested God’s ‘shearing’ of her (40:27; 49:14; 63:15).”⁵

⁴ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Isa 53.6.

⁵ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Isa 53.7.

B. He was unjustly tried and executed (8)

1. "Oppression and judgement" refer to injustice of trial
2. "As for his generation..." he had no generation (it seemed)

"Childlessness in His culture suggested a futile existence and a curse from God. People would conclude that He died cursed by God rather than as a substitute sacrifice."⁶

No generation?

Jn 1.12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,

3. He was cut off for the transgression of my people ... to whom the stroke was due

Only place in the Song where the chorus of the remnant goes into the first person – as if the singer is singing solo in this line

C. We thought he would be buried with the wicked (9)

1. He got what he deserved, we thought
2. Yet... he was with a rich man in his death (in the rich man's tomb)
3. Because he was not guilty

It is as if all the blows from the Father ended when he cried, "It is finished."

Conclusion:

Recall what I said at the beginning of the message:

This is the believing remnant who will enter the millennial kingdom. The speaker's Isaiah imagines is *at least* them.

Besides the believing remnant, there is a remnant of Jewish believers in the church even today. This is *their* testimony as well.

⁶ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Isa 53.8.

Particularly notable among those who esteemed Christ smitten by God was a young man who became exceedingly zealous in his attacks on Christ's people. A young man named Saul.

This could be his song... (read 1-9 again, in first person)

What about you? Is it your song? He died for you.