

Isaiah 53 – God’s Eternal Intercession Through His Faithful Servant, Easter WWC April 4, 2021

Good morning. The Lord bless you on this amazing day in which we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not just that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the grave that we celebrate this morning, but that His resurrection established the path of hope that has been the anchor of faith for millions throughout the centuries. Over the last several Easters here at Westwood, we have tried to walk through teaching that encouraged our faith in the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. This morning I want to focus on a passage of scripture that helps us with a common question regarding God and His goodness. Often times I have heard people deny the existence of God simply because they cannot believe that there is a God when they see so much suffering in the world. The mercy of God for us is that there are thousands of years of recorded history of God interceding in this world, and of course the culmination of that intercession being the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God sent His Son, Jesus, to the earth to *identify with us in our suffering and need*, so that after Jesus accomplished His work of salvation, Jesus might make us identifiable to God in His holiness. Jesus Christ came into the world to deal with the cause of misery, which is sin. Biblically speaking, sin results in physical death, and spiritual judgment, but Jesus Christ’s life and death and resurrection has provided the means of deliverance from these things. One person in the Bible says it like this, “**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,**” 1 Corinthians 15:56-57.

The passage, Isaiah 53, is really not that complicated, but the profundity of the content, along with the setting in which it is written, has awed God’s people for centuries. Let’s consider some context so that we can better grasp the power of what is being communicated through this amazing passage. Context helps us enter into the information we are trying to process in such way that we can apprehend through all of our senses what is being communicated. Contexts is the musical sound of information. It lets us hear and feel the harmony of thought surrounding the passage we are reading. Isaiah 53 is nestled in the most complete book of the Old Testament Bible, the Tanakh, as it is called by the Jewish community. It’s author, Isaiah, was the most preeminent prophet in Israel. His role was not only to talk about what God had revealed, but to underscore what God has already called His people to, as well as to speak out against the wickedness of the surrounding nations. His work spanned the reign of four kings of Judah and is recorded over what has now been organized into 66 chapters. His ministry experienced times of revival in Israel, and times of unfaithfulness to God. His work could certainly reflect the experience of the Christian church throughout history. As far as his place in history, he was writing 700 years before the coming of Jesus Christ. So, our consideration of Isaiah takes us under the tutelage of something that is almost 3000 years old. But what is astonishing comes into focus when we compare Isaiah’s writing to the life of Jesus.

Here is what makes Isaiah 53 so amazing, of all the scriptures that are read in synagogal worship, Isaiah 53 is never read. It has been coined by Jewish Christians as the “forbidden chapter.” Mitch Glaser, a Christian scholar who was raised in a traditional Jewish home, notes this in his book on this particular chapter. “**Many Jewish people, even those who are religious, are unfamiliar with Isaiah chapter 53 because Isaiah 53 is not included in the weekly *Haftarah* portions read in the synagogue. I would not suggest that omitting this chapter from the weekly *Haftarah* portion was an intentional act of conspiracy, yet it is somewhat mysterious as to why the cyclical synagogue readings go from Isaiah chapter 52 to chapter 54. We are all free to make up our minds about the reason why our sages chose to skip over the 53rd chapter.**” (Mitch Glaser, *Isaiah 53 Explained* (USA: Chosen People Productions, 2010) pg. 12)

One particular ministry in Israel records Jewish people reading and interacting with Isaiah 53 in the Hebrew tongue. It is fascinating to see the power of this chapter press into their souls. You may be interested in looking at that on your own. Here is the link if you are interested: <https://www.treeoflifeisrael.org>, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGz9BVJ_k6s. Even if we determine that this very Jewish chapter, from this very Jewish prophet, is not read in synagogue because people don’t know what to do with it, it should cause us to wonder what it says.

As we approach what it says we must take into account that it is part of a literary portion of Isaiah identified as the Servant Songs. You see, what Isaiah has painted throughout his amazing composition is that every facet of Israel's history and people had been corrupted by rejecting all that God intended, God's promises, God's plan, and God's person. But it isn't just Israel that is identified in this book, it is the world. Isaiah's prophecies, rebuttals, and prayers encompass a global vision. Israel's sins and failures were, and are, clearly seen in every nation's structure, even ours so many thousand years later. Israel as a nation simply provided a picture of what was needed universally. But more deeply, it isn't just the representation of societies sins that are being called to account in this Servant Song composition and background, it is that there are national sins **because every individual has to account that he or she is a sinner innately.** The most intrepid lie that is coating the landscape of our country right now is that the sins in our culture are society based and that if those sins are changed, society will change. My friends the only way to change society is to change individuals. Further, the change that God demands is **first** a recognition of what we really are individually. **"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,"** says the Word; **Romans 3:23. *The Servant sent from God was going to deal with society by dealing with the individual's pain, suffering, and sin.***

Let's take some time, then, to consider the content of Isaiah 53. What does it say? Isaiah 53 is made up of 12 verses. The song actually has five stanzas which begin in chapter 52. **Verses 13-15** make up **stanza number 1.** **"Behold, my servant shall act wisely, he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted."** The word that translates **"shall act wisely"** has the idea of **acting prudently, reasonably, and with insight.** We might expect then that this servant would be distinguished in society. But **verse 14** then introduces an idea that this wise servant caused wonder because his appearance was marred so much that it betrayed a normal human form. It is the sense of **disfigurement.** The consequent action of this wise servant in this state is said to perform a religious ritual over many nations, that of **sprinkling, spattering.** The verb is used in **unintentional and intentional forms,** as when **something splatters** on something else by accident, or, as in the sense of the Tabernacle observances and **rituals of purification, blood was spattered, sprinkled on items in order to atone for them.** This is the sense that is given here. **The Servant of the Lord who has such wisdom is destroyed, and His blood becomes a means of purification before God. But it is not just purification for the people of Israel. The goyim, the nations, are brought into this wise Servants religious intercession.**

Stanza number 2 begins with **chapter 53:1** and moves through **verse 3.** Verse 1 raises the astonished meditation of people who hear about the life and work of this Servant from the Lord. He is a Servant who reveals that **"the arm of the LORD has been revealed."** It sounds a little strange to our ears, to be sure. But this is a phrase that often is used in the O.T. to **underscore God's power to provide for, and deliver His people from hardship.** Just what kind of hardship is being spoken of in this chapter? What would be the point of religious purification through blood if it was not to deal with sin? On the onset there is an underscoring theme that only God can deal with sin. Do you believe that? **Verse 2,** appeals to an agricultural picture. In a time of drought God causes this servant to come to be like a sprout during a drought. God brought Him forth during a time of drought but brought him up without any distinguishing features that would have caused mankind to consider this Servant. **"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."** **No one knew God's intention with this Servant, and no one cared because He did not depict the kind of qualities that cause us as human beings to pay attention.** We want pedigree. God's servant has no display of majesty. We want a sense as to function and contributive power of someone that we hold up as a leader. God's Servant came with humility. We want someone who has attractive pride. There was nothing about Christ's features that distinguished Him in beauty. Sorry, the artists that paint Jesus as this pretty boy model have obviously ignored this verse. Not only that, but this servant whom God had brought to be 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."** In other words, the wise one whom God had brought forth during a time of drought, this one who would bring God's purification to the nations was indeed rejected by mankind. It established in this Servant's life a constant experience of sorrow and grief. My friends, do you know that even today people question whether or not Jesus was a historical figure? With all the archeological advancements and discoveries that we have made that source a robust evidence of the New Testament's Jesus Christ's actual existence, it makes us

wonder what is really causing this disdain for Jesus. What does your gut reaction tell you about what you really think about Jesus?

Stanza number 3 begins with **verse 4** and moves through **verse 6**. Here the prophet Isaiah declares that what was missed by all was that ***this Servant was carrying our sorrows and griefs, not his own***. It was assumed that He suffered because of His own sin, His own life choices and experiences, but in fact, God was smiting Him on our behalf. **Verse 6** says that “**He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities,**” and that occasioned our healing. In other words, ***His sprinkled blood really did bring purification before God***. We, on the other hand, are unlike this Servant. We departed from the will of God and performed our own will. He embraced the weight of all our iniquity which God laid upon him. What’s more is the exactitude of prophecy. John the eye witness of Christ’s death recounts how Jesus Christ was pierced with a spear, and blood and water sprayed out on the ground.

Stanza number 4 awakens the emotions as Isaiah details the implications of this Servant’s faithfulness. It moves from **verse 7 through verse 9**. This servant was opposed. He was afflicted. In all of this He remained silent. He was like a lamb that was led to the slaughter. He was silent like a sheep who is being sheered before being butchered. And even though His experience was cruelly unjust, no one cared. “**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 transgressions of my people?**” This Servant would experience identification with the wicked, with a rich man, even though He was innocent of any crime of action *or crime of heart*. **Verse 9** is so striking. Of what person can it actually be said that there is no heart thought that would incriminate us in sin? But this is exactly what Isaiah says is true of this Servant. Can you see the trial of Christ? Can you see the silence as He stands before the Sanhedrin and the Roman governor?

Verse 10-12 complete the Servant Song. It is a section that focuses upon what God was doing in this Servant’s experience, and what God intended to do for the Servant for His faithfulness. **Verse 10**, “**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.***” What a verse! Isaiah says that God has raised this Servant up ***to cause His soul to atone for sin***. Not only that, but Isaiah ***anticipates that this Servant would come back to life*** after this work. He talked about His death, and then *talks about what happens AFTER His soul makes atonement*. And as for the desire of this Servant, Isaiah includes, “**Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied.**” In the midst of His suffering the servant was looking beyond the pain to the consequence of His actions, and He was satisfied. Because He came to know this pain of atonement, He would be able to make many right before God. He will bear their iniquities. And so, this song finishes in triumph. There will be a reward of souls for His labor.

Can you see why Isaiah begins His next section with the words, “**Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor!**”

Here, then, is the ultimate question, ***of whom does this section speak?*** Obviously I’ve seeded this commentary with the fulfillment being in Jesus Christ. But let’s think about it. It cannot be fulfilled in Israel as a nation. It is clear that in this text ***the nation*** rejects this Servant of the LORD. It cannot be any other nation, ***for the nations need to be sprinkled by the Servant for their Sin***. IT cannot be Jacob himself. His life was fraught with sin that Moses very capably records. Oh, dear friends, the Servant of the LORD is Christ Jesus! There is no other.

Just consider how Jewish people, who rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah, write about Him after His resurrection. They write about Him not as a rejection of their heritage, but as the very satisfaction of it.

Stanza 1, the Servant was broken and abused. Mk 15:16–20 ¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him.

²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Stanza 2, the Servant was rejected and despised. Mk 15:6-15 ⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. ⁹ “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. **¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.** ¹² “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. ¹³ “Crucify him!” they shouted. ¹⁴ “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” ¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Stanza 3, the Servant was wounded, crushed, and chastised and everyone abandoned Him. Mt 26:55–56 ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” **Then all the disciples left him and fled.**

Stanza 4, the Servant was killed and buried with the wicked and rich. Mk 15:27–32 ²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ^[28] ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Mt 27:57–61 ⁵⁷ When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹ And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Stanza 5, God allows this Servant to atone for others by His own soul, and the Servant lives on before God.

Mt 27:45–54 ⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Mt 28:1–10 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and

behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

Dear friends, **Isaiah 53 is a polemic of how people respond to Christ** and how God responded to mankind in need. How are you responding? And if Christ has that kind of power, to atone by His own authority and soul, and to do so because He has been directed by God to do so, what will become of you if you reject Him? There is no work that you can do to compare to the work of Christ. There is no way that God would even allow you to try. Will you rest in Him today and trust Him for your eternal life? And Christian, look at the power of God! Look at how He has redeemed your soul. Can we not say as Paul,

Romans 8:31–39³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Praise His Glorious Name! Amen.