

ISAIAH 53:1-12
PARES AND SPARES CLASS
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, WAYCROSS
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Introduction

Are you wondering where God is in today's world?

Has He simply thrown up His hands in exasperation and said "Enough!"?

He would have every right to do that as our nation seems to have lost its spiritual mind and its social conscience.

Hopefully I'm not the only one who is burdened by this.

But in my heart and in my head, I know that God is still working out His salvation plan in the world He created. I know that God is as involved today as He has been throughout the history of mankind. I know that God is as near and real as our next breath or our next heartbeat or the sunrise this morning.

I'm convinced of this because eons ago, God prepared the solution for, the victory over, the sinfulness of mankind. No matter how dark the world around us might seem, no matter how it seems that Satan has been placed on the throne of this world, God has already won the victory; the victor is certain.

The verses for today's lesson describe God's Suffering Servant, the Messiah, God's solution and God's victor.

In the Book of Isaiah, there are numerous references to the coming of the One Who would carry out God's saving work for the benefit of both the Jews and the Gentiles. His name would be Jesus.

You and I have the benefit of considering the words of Isaiah both from the perspective of his listeners and from the perspective of people who know that Jesus came. We can read in the New Testament about His ministry; we know that He fulfilled this prophecy in detail; we are certain that He rose from the grave, appeared to His disciples, and ascended into heaven. And we expectantly await His return.

But in days like today, we are tempted to wonder if our faith is misplaced. And we are tempted to wonder just where God is in all that we are experiencing.

This is not a new experience for the children of God throughout history. Satan has been actively trying to destroy Believers and their devotion to Christ for 2,000 years.

But Jesus comforted His disciples with these words for a reason: "You believe in God, believe also in me."

God is real. God is alive. God knows what His children are going through. God has already won the victory through Christ Jesus.

His promise and reminder to us today still remains: “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

In today’s lesson, we’ll look at Isaiah’s description of the Messiah which begins in 52:13, but we will pick up his description in chapter 53.

Despised (Isaiah 53:1-3)

Isaiah made no secret of the fact that what he was sharing with the people would be difficult for them to understand or comprehend.

When Isaiah wrote, “Who has believed what we have heard,” perhaps he was describing his own confusion and amazement. But, nevertheless, he reported faithfully to the people what God had shown him.

Isaiah assured his listeners that it was “the Lord” Who had revealed this message for them.

And then he began to describe the servant.

He said the Servant would grow like a plant out of dry ground, like a normal plant that springs up from the dirt; someone so normal that no one would take notice; that he would not have any particularly impressive or majestic physical traits to draw attention to him.

When I considered this, I was reminded that when Saul was chosen as the first King of Israel, one of the distinguishing descriptions of him was that he was “an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others.” (1 Samuel 9:2b) Saul’s height set him apart from everyone else.

Unlike Saul, the Messiah would not have any particular physical characteristics that would make him stand out in a crowd.

He would grow up just like everyone else: He would look like a commoner; he would be identified with the common people.

Isaiah also said that the coming Servant would be “despised and rejected by men;” a man of “sorrows” or “suffering” who had experienced real life.

From this side of the cross, we know that Jesus grew up in a poor, lower class family in a time where such people were not respected. He knew grief and pain as the result of what the loss of his earthy father meant to him as the oldest son and how it affected his family. We know that many of the people he grew up with in Nazareth rejected His ministry, even attempting to kill Him. And we know the Jewish leaders and people to whom He was sent rejected Him and eventually hated Him, beat Him, spat on Him, killed Him.

Jesus did not fit the description of the man the Jews expected to be their Savior, so they rejected Him. So do the Jews and most everyone else today.

But He fit perfectly the description of God's intended Messiah, God's ultimate gift to and solution for, mankind.

Substitute (Isaiah 53:4-6)

In spite of his growing up poor, knowing the pain that life can throw at us, not meeting the expectations of those He came to save, Jesus STILL carried out His mission and ministry for God.

Even though hated and rejected, He willingly took upon Himself all the troubles that we experience in life:

1. He bore our griefs;
2. He suffered over and took on the burden of our pain and guilt;
3. His hands and feet were nailed to a cross, His side was pierced with a sword, not because of any crime or wrong He had committed but because He exemplified God's intention for mankind which exposed the hearts of men and threatened their way of life;
4. He was physically and emotionally crushed by our sins;
5. His extreme, unthinkable, unimaginable punishment was carried out because it was the only way we could have peace and harmony with God;
6. He was severely wounded for what I did, but it was those wounds He took willingly upon Himself that resulted in my being healed.

Then Isaiah described what God through Jesus did for each of us: "...the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all."

The thing that makes it so amazing is that it is we who have sinned, it is we who have rebelled, it is we who should have been punished. But it was Jesus, God's Son incarnate, whom God punished.

He experienced all this pain and rejection for me so that I could be reconciled to God.

These verses describe the concept of "substitutionary atonement." It isn't a new concept in the Bible; the sacrificing of lambs as an atonement to God for mankind's sin had been introduced hundreds of years before.

But the idea that a perfect, sinless human being would be horribly sacrificed for my sins and your sins, once and for all, was as new as it was astounding.

It still is astounding when you think about it!

Willing (Isaiah 53:7-9)

Isaiah then described a man who was unjustly charged, mocked, and beaten but who did not argue or defend himself.

Isaiah used a lamb to make his point: just as a lamb is quiet and submissive when it is being led to be sheared or even led to be slaughtered, so this man, the Servant, would go to his horrible death without a word of protest.

He could have marshalled a host of angels to defeat His enemies, but He chose to die for them instead.

At every stage of the illegal and immoral process, Jesus accepted and endured everything without attempting to prove His innocence or to avoid the intended outcome.

The opponents of Jesus unjustly did everything they could to oppose the ministry and message of Jesus, to destroy His reputation, to demean Him publicly.

Yet, at the end of His ordeal, He asked God to forgive them rather than condemn them.

An exemplary, one-of-a-kind, man Who did nothing but love people and help people and try to bring people closer to God was punished by those He came to save and who deserved everything that He actually experienced on their behalf.

He willingly faced and experienced all of this because of the sins of the Jews; because of your and my sins; because of us and for us.

Seemingly out of place in this narrative, Isaiah said that when the Servant would die, he would receive a decent burial. When Jesus died, instead of being left on the cross to rot in public sight with the two thieves, a rich man asked for His body and buried Him in a new tomb in a nearby garden, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah implied that this was an act of God for a man "who had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully." After all that Jesus endured, God provided Him a respectful burial.

Sacrificed (Isaiah 53:10-12)

Note the word "yet." A small word, but in this case, one that holds unimaginable meaning.

Isaiah said that as severely crushing as the Messiah's suffering and death would be, this was a part of God's plan for His people and for all the people of the world; that His death would not be the end His existence; God would give Him a family, "prolong His days;" after His "anguish," the Servant would see the results of what had been accomplished and be satisfied because He would know that "many had been justified," made right with God, because He had completed God's assignment which provided atonement for mankind's sins.

In verse 12, God outlined the rewards for the Messiah's faithfulness:

1. God promised to give the Servant "the many," to give the Servant a kingdom of his own.
2. God promised to give the Servant the "mighty," the rich and powerful, as the spoils of war because he had willingly submitted to the plan of God, including his death.
3. God acknowledged the Servant as His own. God said that, even though people had considered the Servant to be a rebel, in reality the Servant had been sent by God, had obeyed God faithfully, and had interceded on behalf of the real rebels, paying the price for their iniquities.

Conclusion

The God we serve has gone out of His way to reveal Himself to us and to prove Himself to us.

Isaiah's description and revelation of the Suffering Servant is just one of the ways God has shown Himself to us.

In this particular revelation, we see the details of our loving God in His provision for us and how far He will go to bring us back into a right relationship with Him.

In realizing how perfectly Jesus fulfills this prophecy, we can know with assurance that Jesus is God's Suffering Servant, the Messiah, our Savior.

But even more, we can be assured that all those prophecies which are yet to be fulfilled will be fulfilled just as completely, just as perfectly, and just as timely as this one.

Even in these days of social, political, and spiritual unrest, God is in control of His world and the destiny of those who place their trust in Him.

Ours is not the first generation of Christians to face tribulation, to wonder where God is, to wonder if our faith is misplaced.

God has proven Himself worthy of our complete trust in the past; He proves Himself to us each and every day; and we can face every remaining moment of our lives with the knowledge that He stands beside us no matter what.

As Satan unleashes his formidable forces in our midst, we must never doubt that God defeated Satan 2,000 years ago in that garden tomb.

We may wonder what God is doing in our lifetime, but we must not question that God is actively moving His plan of salvation forward, even in our confusion.

As we have discussed before, it is not God's faithfulness to us that is in question; the question is our faithfulness to Him.