

Isaiah 53:1-12 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.

Isaiah 53.1-12 | The Righteous One

When the world becomes more opaque to our ordinary reasoning we become more prone to believe false conspiracy theories. Now the interesting thing about a conspiracy theory is it must use the data that we all can see, then in the background weave some elaborate connections. For example. Have you noticed that we haven't been back to the moon in a long time? Have you also noticed that 2001: A Space Odyssey is an absolute masterpiece of cinema that holds up better than any of the Disney Star Wars movies? This is non-controversial data which has universal agreement. Now let's add a conspiracy. Stanley Kubrick directed the moon landing, because a child wore a Saturn V rocket sweater in the Shining. We all have that data. You can look at it and see one giant leap for mankind, or a hoax by the greatest director of all time. Someone is secretly working in the background.

Now Christianity makes this incredible claim about the lives of all who believe in Christ. God is conspiring in the background for your highest good. All of the data of your life could be interpreted through this lens. And here is the highest good of the mission he has accomplished, the restoration of our relationship with the Lord. All that is evil in the world flows from this broken relationship with God, and all that is good is tied to this reconciliation. We all have the data, but like a conspiracy, you can look right at it and miss it. Our hope of seeing it is revelation.

1. The Arm of the Lord

Isaiah 53:1-12 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

The Arm of the Lord is throughout scripture a reference to God's saving power for his people. The arm of the Lord is that which was stretched out and parted the Red Sea to bring his people safely through and wash away the armies of Egypt. This servant song begins with the question, who has believed? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Is there anyone who trusts in the saving power of the Lord or would believe that the most fundamental power in existence is the Lord's saving power? Why would the arm of the Lord be hard to believe?

Isaiah 53:2 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.

Well the arm of the Lord, his saving power is the Lord himself, and as this next verse shows, it is also a "he" and he is before the Lord. He grew up as men grow up, he has a human lineage from the dry ground. And he has no extraordinary beauty or majesty that he would capture our attention or that we would be drawn to him. You see the arm of the Lord is not one you could pick out of a line up, but one who must be revealed to you. Now it might have been enough that he should be hidden from us in his ordinariness, but he was buried more deeply than the ordinary.

Isaiah 53:3 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.

He was less than ordinary. One whom we didn't just look over but one whom we intentionally hid our faces. If he was standing on the street corner we would pull our cars so that the windshield pillar hid him from our gaze. He did not look like a life well lived overflowing with wealth and honor but dejected, full of sadness. You would not just miss him, you would avoid him.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? The arm of the Lord, the Lord's saving power, is a man pitiable and detestable. Oh how we miss the conspiracy of the Lord's goodness.

But what if we were to see just his actions? You'd be tempted to say that the arm of the Lord is a failure.

2. The Oppression of the Servant

Isaiah 53:8 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?

He looks as one who is under oppression and judgment. That is he looks like one who is under the curse of the world, oppressed by all the wickedness in existence. But it also is so clearly directed towards him that he looks like someone who deserves it. What is his outcome? Well people will look at him and say he was cut off from the land of the living. He is killed. You know it is Adam and Eve who are cast out from the land for the sin, removed from the garden. It is the nation of Israel who is removed from the promised land into exile by the judgement of God. This servant fits that pattern. Not the pattern of victory but the pattern of defeat.

Isaiah 53:9 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.

His grave is made with the wicked. He is given no noble burial, but he is buried with the wicked. Tossed away. But the strangeness, he had done no violence, he had not deceived.

I want this tension to mount up as these most impossibly opposite things come together. The arm of the Lord. A sorrowful man destroyed. What was happening? How can the arm of the Lord be revealed in this? The middle passages of this text reveal it to us. And it is shown in the difference between the “we” and the “he” throughout these middle passages.

3. We and He

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

We esteemed him stricken and smitten by God and afflicted. We were like Job’s friends who look at him and consider that he deserves the punishment he is receiving. But surely, meaning the fact of the matter is the griefs and sorrows he is bearing. Those aren’t his. They are ours.

Isaiah 53:5 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.

The arm of the lord is the one who is pierced, the arm of the Lord is the one who is crushed. Look at the difference between the he and the we. It is our transgressions for which he is pierced it is our iniquities for which he is crushed. His chastisement brought us peace with God and his wounds brought us our healing.

Isaiah 53:6 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.

Here is the center of the song, and perhaps the center of all the servant songs. Who are we in the story of redemption. We are all together in this reality, we have gone astray from our Lord. We have turned all of us to his own way. We as a collective and individually have turned away from the Lord. We're together in that.

But one stands alone. Separated from the group, like a lamb culled from the herd for slaughter. He is like us but he is totally unlike us. All of our iniquity has been laid upon the servant. So all the sheep go free.

How strange that we might consider the central conflict in the world as one between justice and mercy. I've heard it said that this is the most unbelievable part of Christianity. No other philosopher or religion places a conflict between justice and mercy at the center of their faith. Some faiths just view us on a process of development towards absolute unity. Other faiths view the world as non-developmental. But Christianity uniquely sees the central conflict of existence as one between justice and mercy. Why is that?

Because Christianity understands that the center of our world is a relationship. A broken relationship. Who we are is who we are related to our creator. But it is our creator who stretched out his arm, took on our flesh, and received all the requirements of justice due to us, so that we might walk in mercy.

This is the hope of our faith. Here is the good news conspiracy. Jesus has paid for your sin. He has washed you clean before the Lord, and in his righteousness you stand reconciled. The justice you deserve was given to him and the mercy he deserved was given to us.

Behold the man upon the cross
 My sin upon his shoulders
 Ashamed I hear my mocking voice
 Call out among the scoffers
 It was my sin that held him
 Until it was accomplished
 His dying breath has brought me life
 I know that it is finished.

Now what does this mean for all the suffering in your life? In Christ it is not your punishment, it will not amount to the victory of evil, it will not realize your destruction or prove God's abandonment. We saw the one who was abandoned, and by him we are healed.