

Advent 2022 — Promise of Rescue

Isaiah 53

Please open your Bibles to **Isaiah 53**. Put your finger there and be patient with me for a few minutes. During this advent season, we are considering, “Why Christmas?” Was the coming of Christ in human form really necessary at all. Last week, Steve examined the fall into sin from Genesis 3, and I am grateful for his good work there. This week we begin with a look at God’s plan before Genesis 3, and then look forward to the promise of rescue from the catastrophe of Genesis 3. **PRAY**

Consider this truth from **Revelation 4:11** that underlines everything about our God and his creation. Read it with me, please.

**Worthy are you, our Lord, and God, to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things, and by your will, they existed and were created.**

So we have two eternal truths:

- The first truth is the Lord God has always been. If there is any creation now, there must be someone uncreated who has the power of being in himself. **God** is uncreated and self-existent, distinct from all he has made. Further, he is worthy to receive glory and honor and power. As he is eternal in his being, he is eternally worthy to receive glory, and honor, and power. He does not become worthy in Revelation 4; he simply is worthy. So he is to be worshiped, honored and glorified from eternity past, in the Garden in Genesis, as he walked the earth in the Gospels, by all creation of all times, and into eternity future from our perspective.
- The second truth is that he created all things, and in him all things hold together.

So these two truths: he is the eternal God, eternally worthy of glory, and he is creator of all that is. They go hand-in-hand, to help us understand why the crown of his creation, Adam and Eve, were cast out of the garden and driven away from the life-giving presence of God. They were created by God, for God, to glorify God in their obedience, but ultimately refused to bow before God, robbing him of his glory, and treasonously acted to overthrow his authority as though they were God themselves. Do you understand how their rebellion was a strike at the both the very reign of God and against his character, since by their actions they declared he was not worthy of worship through obedience. RC Sproul aptly describes their rebellion as “cosmic treason.” No wonder we both see and experience the catastrophic collapse of Genesis 3. When we grasp the both nature of Holy God, worthy of

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worship, and the nature of our treason and sin, we gain a reference point to make sense of the corrupt, broken world we live in. How can anything be right, or whole in all creation when all creation is designed to glorify God goes off the rails and refuses to do so? Because he is worthy of worship, any failure to worship him is sin. Because he is holy, he must judge and destroy sin. Though the world is at war against God, refusing to glorify him, Holy God will not be robbed of his glory. He will either be glorified as we submit to him in willing worship, or he will be glorified in his righteous judgment of sin as he subjects the world, and mankind, to futility and death.

So, last week we saw that in his judgment of Adam and Eve's rebellion, spiritual death, physical death, and relational death followed, just as God had warned. These different divisions of death are really second tier explanations, rather than the root problem. The root is that because of our treason, we were driven away from communion with God. Because God alone is the source of life, since all things are held together by him,¹ because life is in him² — to be separated from him — to be driven away from communion with Holy God — is to be cut off from life and chained in death. We saw the various expressions of death: spiritual, relational, physical. But, again, the core issue is separation from God. That death-producing problem is captured in the last verse of Genesis 3. Read it with me.

Genesis 3:24 — He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden, he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

So we are driven out, and that separation is dramatically underscored by a holy flaming sword that keeps glory-robbing rebels away from the only source of life. If we are to ever overcome the primary problem of separation from God, someone is going to have to deal with the holy flaming sword. That was a long introduction that brings us to where we are today. Our God is a holy God, and our God is a seeking, pursuing, ransoming and rescuing his fallen creation to restore worship as he planned from all eternity. In order for that communion and worship to be recovered, someone will have to suffer the wrath and bear the fiery penalty of holy judgments against wickedness and sin that the sword represents. With that in mind, let's read about God's promise to provide a wrath-bearer and sin-penalty payer in order that we might be forgiven, brought back, and live. **Isaiah 53**

¹ 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;

¹ Colossians 1:17

² John 1:4

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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.

With an understanding of the radical impact of our sin and the just consequences, I want to spend the remaining time looking at the nature of God's promise to rescue us through Jesus, who did not consider his equality with God a thing to be grasped, but set aside the glory of heaven, condescending to take the form of a servant. The way in which God promises to restore us is shocking at every level.

First, since the nature of our separation is a state of war, a state of hostility and rebellion between us, and God, one might think the rescue plan would involve a conquering king regaled in robes, with

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marching armies, mighty weapons, and a glimmering crown. Indeed, we will ultimately see that, but that is not how the rescue plan is initiated. **Vv 2–3** tell us his physical presence and appearance will not be handsome or attractive. Human expectations of physical beauty are replaced by God's wisdom that is wiser and higher than the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. He will not rescue through creaturely strategies, so people will not follow him as long as they continue to look for those earth-bound values. The promised servant of God will despised and rejected by those who prefer a god of their own imagination. His coming victory cannot be won by the earth-bound means of good looks, influence, or popularity. Rescue will be accomplished through divine means, according to a divine plan, completed by a divine Savior.

V 4: His victory over sin and death will be accomplished by bearing our griefs — this catch-all term that describes all the brokenness, sickness, and pain we suffer physically, relationally, and spiritually as a result of our sin. Grief from the loss of a child because the body is under a curse. Grief from selfishness that has shattered relationships beyond repair through human effort. Grief from my own sinful choices that have left a wake of destruction and ruin and changed the trajectory of my life. Grief from sexual sin that has cut contours of death and loss through the center of your soul so that there seems no path to real healing or full recovery. Look away from yourself and see this promised Suffering Servant bearing your grief. The hideousness of my sin, which I deny and refuse to honestly acknowledge in my own mirror — I see it there in the of face of the one who was in very nature God, but set aside his glory to become my substitute and yours, and suffer for all those who will receive his substitutionary sacrifice by faith. Torn flesh ripped away by Roman whips... A crown of thorns mashed into a now-bloody scalp. These tools of death sovereignly mete out God's holy punishment against our sin, and this sin-consuming wrath makes us want to hide our faces.

Every bitter thought, every evil deed, crowning your blood-stained brow.

Look there and see the horror of your sin placed on the Savior. But keep looking to him and also see that **he is** bearing your grief — he is there, he is willing, he has become obedient to the point of death to remain there as your substitute! Look and see him who is stricken by the God of Genesis 3 so that the driven-out children of Genesis 3 may be rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought home. Look, and live, that your spiritual death will be turn to spiritual life.

And look there and see the thoroughness and totality of God's rescue to fully and completely bring sinners back to communion with God and deliver them all the way into his Kingdom through his peace-making cross.

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V. 5 He bore the chastisement that brought us peace. Since the Garden Rebellion a state of war, separation, and hostility existed between God and mankind. The rescue plan must make peace, and it does. All of this undoes the categories of death.

Relational life is recovered through the Messiah's reconciling, peace-making cross.

Eternal life physically through a healed body is recovered through the very wounds that brought about his death. Some have taken the promise at the end of v. 5 to say that God always heals, just have faith. God does undo our physical death, but there is no promise to do so on this side of the resurrection. Indeed, we know that we must pass through death in this body in order to receive the new body like his, equipped for eternal worship and service. God may heal here and now, but that is at his pleasure. He will heal and transform these lowly bodies *then* to be whole and free from corruption and in the resurrection. We look forward to the resurrection promise just as they did.

Two things, briefly, as we wrap up. We have seen the promise of what he will do, but I want us to see the operative means by which he will rescue us. He will do it through his righteous life. **V 9** tells us **he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth**. Where my unrighteousness produced spiritual death, his perfect, positive righteous life makes spiritual life possible for me when, by faith, his moral perfections are credited to my moral bankruptcy as righteousness. It is his righteousness that God sees as acceptable and then allows me access back into his present. Here we see clearly a reason for Christmas. I am morally bankrupt, but perfect righteousness is required to commune with Holy God, and I cannot produce it. God's promised rescue plan provides in Jesus perfect righteousness through his perfect keeping of God's holy law.

Lastly, note the shocking outcome of all of this: Jesus is the Victor!

V 10 — ... when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. **V 11** — He shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one make many to be accounted righteous.

The rescue plan is not what man would have done. That's a good thing, since man cannot accomplish what is required. Through the foolishness and shame of a cross, the Messiah wins. Had we stopped at the beginning of this passage where we saw him pierced and marred and killed, what sane person would have had any hope that his rescue mission would succeed? In the wisdom of God, many are brought back to God's table through the Messiah's substitutionary atonement.

It's a shocking turn of events, and we can rejoice in this for all of eternity. We do well to be reminded of it not only for eternity, but in our present world and culture which seems more hostile to God than

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ever on this continent. Jesus **is not**, and **will not** be defeated in the face of what appears to be overwhelming odds. He is not conquered by the onslaught of sin poured out on him; he conquers sin and rescues sinners, delivering them all the way back to the communion table. Those who now appear to be in a place of winning against the son of God will ultimately come and give God the glory as he is due — either joyfully and willing as rescued worshipers, or mournfully and regretfully through their forced acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord.

Being found in human form, [the promised Messiah] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that, at the name of Jesus, every nation bow, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the father.

Amen.

PRAY