

# Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



## Have We Been Paying Attention? (*Prelude to Isaiah 53*)

Rabbi Cosmo Panzetta

### Devotion and Discussion Questions

**Key Texts (TLV): 52:1-13; Is. 42:1-4, 19-22; 43:1, 16-19; 48:3, 6, 15-16; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 51:4-9**

As we arrive at the end of Isaiah 52, we are standing at the threshold of one of the most breathtaking passages in all of Scripture. But Isaiah does not rush us there. He slows us down and forces us to look back before we move forward. In that sense, this passage is a necessary prelude. It may feel like a recap, but it is a holy recap. We do not come to Is. 52:13 or into Is. 53 as though these things appear out of nowhere. The surprise is real, but it is not without preparation. The prophet has been leading us here all along. The question is not whether God has been speaking. The question is whether we have been paying attention.

Isaiah begins this section by calling Zion to wake up, rise up, and clothe herself in what God intended for her from the beginning. "Awake, awake! Clothe yourself in strength, Zion. Clothe yourself in beautiful garments, Jerusalem, the holy city" (Is. 52:1). The imagery is priestly and royal. Jerusalem is being told to become what she was made to be: a holy people, a kingdom of priests. She is to shake off the dust, loosen the chains from her neck, and sit in dignity because the Lord has spoken a word that guarantees deliverance. And yet that promise creates a question that hangs in the air: "You were sold for nothing, and you will be redeemed without silver" (Is. 52:3). If not with silver, then with what? Isaiah wants that question to stay with us.

#### 1. THE LORD HAS BEEN PREPARING US FOR A GREATER REDEMPTION

Isaiah reviews the long history of Israel's oppression, from Egypt to Assyria, and in doing so he reminds us that the Lord has seen every humiliation, every captivity, and every insult against His Name. "*My people are taken away for nothing... and My Name is continually blasphemed all day long*" (Is. 52:5). Yet the answer of God is not resignation, but revelation. He says, "*Therefore My people will know My Name... in that day I am the One who will be saying, 'Hineni!'*" (Is. 52:6). The Lord is not merely sending a message from a distance. He is declaring that there is coming a day when He Himself will be made known in a direct and unmistakable way. His character, His power, and His presence will be revealed in the face of the enemy.

Then, almost cinematically, the text jumps ahead. The Lord says, "*Hineni,*" and then suddenly a runner appears over the mountains crying out, "*Your God reigns!*" (Is. 52:7). Peace has been announced. Good has been proclaimed. Salvation has come. But what happened in between? Isaiah does not tell us yet. He lets the suspense build. The solo runner is joined by watchmen, then by the ruins of Jerusalem breaking forth in song, and finally by the worldwide declaration that "*ADONAI has bared His holy arm before the eyes of all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God*" (Is. 52:10). Deliverance has happened. Redemption has been accomplished. But Isaiah is holding us in suspense because he wants us to feel the weight of the question before he reveals the answer.

#### 2. THE SERVANT IS THE KEY WE WERE MEANT TO NOTICE

When we finally reach Is. 52:13, the curtain begins to pull back: "*Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.*" That language feels triumphant, and rightly so. It sounds like everything we have been waiting for. But Isaiah has already taught us that we must not assume too quickly that we know what this exaltation will look like. Earlier in Isaiah, the servant

language pointed in one sense to Israel. In the first Servant Song, the Lord said, *“Behold My servant, whom I uphold... He will bring justice to the nations”* (Is. 42:1). That sounds glorious. Yet later in the same chapter we learn that Israel as servant is blind and deaf: *“You have seen many things, but you do not pay attention. Though ears are open, no one hears”* (Is. 42:20). Israel was called to serve, but Israel also needed to be redeemed.

That is why the servant songs develop the way they do. In Is. 49, the servant speaks as one called from the womb, hidden in the hand of God, appointed not only to represent Israel, but to bring Jacob back and restore Israel. And even that is not the full picture! That’s “too small” of an assignment! This Servant will be a light TO THE NATIONS—to the world! *“It is too small a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob... So I will give You as a light for the nations, that You should be My salvation to the end of the earth”* (Is. 49:6). This servant is not merely Israel; He is the One who will fulfill Israel’s calling and rescue Israel itself. He will be what Israel was meant to be. He will bring salvation not only to Jacob, but to the ends of the earth. So by the time we hear, *“Behold, My servant will prosper,”* we are meant to understand that this servant is central to the whole story of redemption.

### **3. IF WE HAVE BEEN PAYING ATTENTION, WE SHOULD EXPECT GLORY THROUGH SUFFERING**

Here is where Isaiah gently but firmly confronts our assumptions. We hear that the servant will be exalted, and we instinctively imagine visible power, overwhelming strength, and the kind of deliverance God displayed at the Exodus. And indeed, Isaiah does remind us of that former deliverance. The Lord says, *“Thus says ADONAI, who makes a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters”* (Is. 43:16). But then He adds something startling: *“Do not remember former things... Here I am, doing a new thing”* (Is. 43:18–19). The God who delivered before will deliver again, but not in the way we expect. He is not repeating Himself. He is revealing something deeper.

That is why the third Servant Song matters so much. In Is. 50 the servant speaks of perfect obedience, even when that obedience leads directly into suffering. *“ADONAI Elohim has opened My ear, and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn back. I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those pulling out My beard. I did not hide My face from humiliation and spitting”* (Is. 50:5–6). If we have been paying attention, then the suffering of the servant in Isaiah 52–53 should not come as a total shock. The prophet has already prepared us. This servant sustains the weary with a word, trusts the Lord in darkness, and refuses to save Himself by lighting His own fire. He leans wholly on God. So when the servant is finally revealed as exalted, we must be ready to see that his path to exaltation is not separated from suffering, but moves through it.

### **CONCLUSION**

Isaiah 52:13 is not just an opening line; it is the summit of a long, deliberate climb. The Lord has been speaking from chapter to chapter, layer by layer, preparing His people for a redemption greater than Egypt, greater than exile, and greater than anything they had imagined. He has told them in advance because they are slow to hear, quick to assume, and prone to miss what does not fit their expectations. He has pointed to a servant who would fulfill Israel’s calling, restore Jacob, bring light to the nations, and walk in unwavering obedience even through rejection and suffering. So when we arrive at *“Behold, My servant,”* we are not meant merely to admire the words. We are meant to recognize that all the threads have been leading here.

The question still presses on us: have we been paying attention? Not just to the text, but to the heart of God in the text. The Lord’s way is often deeper, wiser, and more surprising than our instincts. We look for spectacle; He reveals salvation through His servant. We look for immediate power; He

unveils obedience, suffering, vindication, and ultimate exaltation. Isaiah invites us to slow down, listen carefully, and let God tell us what redemption actually looks like. Before we rush into Is. 53, we should let Is. 52:13 stop us and steady us. The servant is the answer. The servant is the hinge. The servant is the One through whom the Lord says, "*Hineni.*"

There is a real invitation here for every heart that has grown dull, distracted, or too familiar with sacred things. It is possible to read Isaiah and still miss the servant. It is possible to know the language of redemption and yet not recognize the way God has chosen to bring it. So the call today is first a call to attention. Let the Word of God wake you up again. Let Him loosen the chains from your neck, shake the dust off your soul, and clothe you again in the beauty of who He has called you to be. Do not stay asleep in places where God has already spoken freedom.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why is it important that Is. 52:13 comes after so much buildup and recap in the earlier chapters of Isaiah?
2. What does the phrase "*you will be redeemed without silver*" (Is. 52:3) stir up in the passage, and why is that question so significant?
3. How do the servant songs in Is. 42, 49, and 50 prepare us to understand the servant in Is. 52:13?
4. In what ways do we tend to expect God to act like He did before, rather than paying attention to the *new thing* He says He is doing?
5. What would it look like in your own life to more fully "pay attention" to the voice of the Lord and trust Him even when His ways are unexpected?

### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

*Avinu Malkhenu*, Our Father, Our King, Father, thank You for speaking so clearly through Your Word. Thank You that You do not leave us in the dark, but patiently prepare our hearts to understand Your ways. Forgive us for the times we have heard but not really listened, seen but not truly paid attention. Wake us up again. Shake the dust from our lives, loosen what has bound us, and clothe us again in the strength and beauty You have called us to walk in.

Teach us to behold Your servant with humble and attentive hearts. Help us trust You when Your ways are deeper than our expectations and Your wisdom leads through places we would not have chosen. Give us ears to hear, hearts to trust, and lives that respond with obedience. May we lean on You in every dark place, and may Your salvation be made known in us and through us.

*B'Shem Yeshua*, In the name of Yeshua, amen.