

WEEK 7 — ISAIAH 53

THE SERVANT KING: The Cross Before the Crown

The Scandal of the Cross

Family, when people picture a king, they imagine a crown.

Power.

Authority.

Victory.

Kings conquer.

Kings rule.

Kings take the throne.

But Isaiah tells us something shocking about the Servant King:

Before the crown... there would be a cross. Before glory... there would be suffering.

Before victory... there would be sacrifice.

And Isaiah wrote these words **700 years before Jesus was born.**

What we are about to read is one of the clearest descriptions of the cross in the entire Bible.

And Isaiah wrote it centuries before crucifixion was even practiced in Israel.

Yet he describes a servant who would be:

- rejected
- pierced
- crushed for sin
- silent before his accusers
- buried with the rich
- and somehow live again.

Which is why Isaiah begins the chapter with a question:

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? **2** He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. **3** He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. **4** Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. **5** But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. **6** We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. **7** He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. **8** By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. **9** He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. **10** Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. **11** After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied: by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. **12** Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Because the idea that the Savior of the world would suffer like this seemed impossible. But Isaiah tells us something essential about the cross.

Big Idea: Jesus did not die as a victim — He suffered as a substitute.

THE STRUCTURE OF ISAIAH 53

Before we walk through the chapter, it helps to understand how Isaiah wrote it. Isaiah 53 is Hebrew poetry, and it is structured like a mountain. The whole passage builds toward the center. And the very center verse is Isaiah 53:6.

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.”

Everything in the chapter builds to that moment. Because that verse explains the cross. Humanity wandered. Jesus carried. We sinned. He bore it.

1. THE SERVANT WAS REJECTED (Isaiah 53:1-3)

Isaiah says: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.”

This would have surprised Israel. They expected a Messiah who looked powerful. Instead Isaiah describes someone ordinary.

Not impressive. Not celebrated. Not admired.

Then Isaiah says: “He was despised and rejected by mankind.”

The word rejected carries the idea of someone avoided, dismissed, or pushed aside. And that is exactly what happened to Jesus.

Rejected by religious leaders.

Rejected by political authorities.

Rejected by the crowds.

Even abandoned by His closest followers. The Servant King came to save the world... and the world turned away from Him.

2. THE SERVANT CARRIED OUR SIN (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Isaiah now reveals the heart of the gospel. “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...”

Notice how often Isaiah repeats the word **our**.

Our pain.

Our suffering.

Our transgressions.

Our iniquities.

The whole chapter hinges on substitution. Jesus was not suffering for His sins. He was suffering for ours.

The Theology of the Cross

Isaiah says: "He was pierced for our transgressions."

Transgressions refer to rebellion against God. And iniquity refers to the twisted nature of sin within us.

Isaiah is describing two realities. We sin because we are broken. And we are broken because we sin.

And the Servant carries both. This is what theologians call **substitutionary atonement**.

Which simply means: Jesus took our place.

At the cross:

- justice was not ignored
- sin was not excused
- evil was not minimized

But sinners were not destroyed.

Instead: Jesus absorbed the judgment we deserved so we could receive the mercy we never earned.

As Paul says: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

ILLUSTRATION — THE SOLDIER WHO TOOK ANOTHER MAN'S PLACE

When Isaiah says, "The punishment that brought us peace was on him..."

he is describing substitution. Someone taking the place of another. Let me tell you a story that helps us feel that.

During World War II, a group of soldiers were ordered to send one man on a dangerous patrol mission. Everyone knew whoever went might not come back. The officer placed slips of paper in a helmet. Each soldier would draw one. One young soldier reached in and unfolded the paper. His name was on it. His face went pale. He had a young wife at home. A child he had barely met. The room fell silent. Then another soldier stepped forward. He said, "Let me take it." The officer said, "You can't. The name has already been drawn." But the soldier insisted. Finally the officer allowed it. The first soldier stepped back. The second soldier went on the mission. And he never came back. The man who lived went home to his family. But for the rest of his life he carried one sentence in his heart: "He died in my place."

Family, that is exactly what Isaiah is describing. Jesus stepped forward and said, "I will take their place."

He carried our guilt.

He bore our judgment.

He absorbed our punishment.

The cross was not an accident. **It was an exchange.**

Our sin for His righteousness.

Our guilt for His grace.

Our death for His life.

Jesus did not die as a victim. **He suffered as our substitute.**

3. THE SERVANT SUFFERED WILLINGLY (Isaiah 53:7-9)

Isaiah writes: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth."

Then comes the famous image: "Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter."

For centuries Israel offered lambs as sacrifices for sin. But those sacrifices were temporary. They pointed forward to a greater sacrifice.

Which is why John the Baptist later says: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Jesus was not trapped by the cross. He chose it.

VISUAL MOMENT

At this moment you could pause and hold up a nail or a small wooden cross.

This is what our sin cost. Not philosophy. Not good advice. Not a moral example. Blood. Pain. A cross. And Jesus embraced it willingly... for us.

4. THE SERVANT'S DEATH BRINGS LIFE (Isaiah 53:10-12)

Isaiah then says something remarkable. "After he has suffered, he will see the light of life."

In other words: The Servant dies... but death is not the end of the story. Isaiah is pointing forward to the resurrection. The cross is not defeat.

It is the turning point of redemption.

Romans 5 says: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

The Servant King goes to the cross... so that sinners can come home.

THE QUESTION ISAIAH ASKS: Isaiah began this chapter with a question. "Who has believed our message?"

That question still stands today. Will we believe it? Will we trust the One who carried our sin? Will we surrender to the Servant King? Because the cross is not just something to admire. It is something to respond to.

Two thousand years ago Jesus carried your sin to the cross. Today the question is simple:
Will you bring it to Him?

SALVATION INVITATION

There may be some here today who have heard about the cross your whole life...
but you have never personally trusted the Savior who died there.

Isaiah says: "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Jesus carried your sin.

Your guilt.

Your shame.

Your past.

And the invitation of the gospel is simple. Bring it to Him. Trust Him. Receive the
forgiveness He purchased. If you want to give your life to Jesus today pray with me.

SALVATION PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I believe You are the Servant who carried my sin. I believe You died in
my place. I believe You rose again. Today I turn from my sin and place my trust in
You. Forgive me. Restore me. Lead my life from this day forward. In Jesus' name,
amen.

CHALLENGE — FOR THE CHURCH

Church, let me speak to the rest of us. If someone truly died in your place... you would
never live casually again. You would live with gratitude. You would live with humility. You
would live with devotion. The cross is not only what saves us. It is what shapes us. So let me
ask us honestly: Are we living like people who have been redeemed? Or have we grown
comfortable around the cross? Isaiah 53 calls us to deeper gratitude... deeper holiness...
and deeper devotion to Christ.

3 CALLS FOR THE CHURCH

1. Remember the cost of your salvation

Never let the cross become ordinary. Return often to the wonder of what Christ has done for you.

2. Lay down what Jesus already carried

Some of us are still carrying shame, guilt, or hidden sin. Bring it back to the cross. Walk in the freedom Jesus purchased.

3. Live like someone who has been redeemed

If the Servant King gave His life for you... then your life belongs to Him. Let the cross shape your obedience, worship, and love for others.

CLOSING PRAYER: Servant King Jesus, Thank You for carrying what we could never carry. Thank You for suffering in our place. Thank You for the cross that brought us life. Help us never grow casual about the price you paid. And help us live in the freedom Your sacrifice purchased. In Jesus' name, amen.