



Isaiah

God gave Isaiah the difficult task of preaching profound biblical truth to a people who would completely ignore it. But this does not mean that Isaiah's words were wasted because they are a blessing to us today. In this series, we will learn from Isaiah's message about our God, who is a righteous king and an irreplaceable sovereign judge. Yet the very same God is a suffering servant who comforts us in our times of need and provides Hope to the nations.

WEEK FIVE

Our God Is a Suffering Servant

Message Passage: Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Acts 8:34-35, Luke 22:36-37, & Revelation 21:4

Small Group Passage: 1 Peter 2:18-25 & 1 Peter 3:13-18

TEACHING AND VIDEO NOTES

There is a term, or title, used again and again in the Old Testament, the Servant of the Lord. While the term “my servant” is used throughout the Old Testament and refers to 15 or more individuals, the term “the Servant of the Lord” is more specific. In biblical scholarship, the phrase usually refers to the servant figure who appears in the Servant Songs of Isaiah (Isa 42:1-4 with Isa 42:5-9; 49:1-6 with Isa 49:7-12; 50:4-9 with Isa 50:10-11; Isa 52:13-53:12).¹

There is debate among scholars about who the “Servant of the Lord” is referring to in these passages. Is it Jesus, or is it referring to someone else? In my humble opinion, there is no debate. It is Jesus, each and every time. The Servant Songs paint a picture of what the long-awaited Messiah would be like and what he would do,² chief among them suffer....

Isaiah 52:13-15 *See, my servant will act wisely;
he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him—*

¹ John D. Barry, “Servant of the Lord,” in The Lexham Bible Dictionary, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

² Albert Barnes, Notes on the Old Testament: Isaiah, vol. 2 (London: Blackie & Son, 1851), 247.

his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—

15 so he will sprinkle many nations,
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.
For what they were not told, they will see,
and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Sprinkling, with blood, water, or oil, had to do with cleansing, with making a person or thing fit to be in the presence of God. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, it always has reference to Israel, but there is no such restriction here. The cleansing the Servant brings is for many nations (15a). **The one that people regarded as unclean (they were appalled at him, 14) will turn out to be the one who cleanses others.** It is a paradox so astounding that it will dry up every accusation and cause every mouth to be stopped (15). The wisdom of God displayed in the Servant will utterly confound human wisdom.³

Isaiah 53:1-3 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.

This Servant of the Lord did not impress people by his appearance. In fact, over time, people came to hate and reject Him. He knew pain and suffering (Heb 2:9). But how could this be? **Why would the long-awaited Messiah be ordinary-looking, be rejected, and suffer?** Because that suffering has a purpose that Isaiah explains next...

Isaiah 53:4-6 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;

³ Barry Webb, The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 210.

*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.*

Jesus suffered for us. His suffering was the punishment that we deserved. And it was by this suffering that we are healed (vs 5), we have peace with God (Vs 5), and our sins are atoned for (vs 6).

Isaiah 53:7-9 *He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;⁴
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.*

When you read this chapter, you sometimes forget which testament you are in. It is prophetic writing that speaks so clearly about Jesus that you forget it was written 700 years before Jesus was born. In fact, verses 7-8 are the very passages that the Ethiopian Eunuch was reading when Philip found him.

Acts 8:34-35 *And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” **35** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.*

This chapter in Isaiah so clearly points to Jesus that Philip, a deacon in the early church, seized on the opportunity to tell this African official all about how Jesus had fulfilled this prophecy that year. From this early convert, Ethiopia would go on to have a rich and vibrant history in the age of the early church.

Isaiah's prophecy would even spell out in vivid detail the resurrection of Jesus.

⁴ Mk 14:61

Isaiah 53:10-11 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.

The Servant's death will not be the end of his career. God will place his seal of approval on his work by raising and exalting him, and the will of the LORD (all God's plans) will prosper in his hand. Like a guilt offering, the Servant's death will provide perfect satisfaction for sin (10). But in startling contrast to what happened in a normal guilt offering, the victim, in this case, will not cease to exist. He will die, yes. But afterwards he will see the light of life, be satisfied (see the fruit of his sacrifice), and justify many (bringing them into a right relationship with God) (11). That is, the Servant will accomplish his God-given mission not only by his death, but also by his life beyond death. He will be a new kind of guilt offering that will utterly surpass anything that has gone before.⁵

Isaiah 53:12 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.

This is not simply us claiming Jesus is in the Old Testament. Jesus himself directly claimed that this passage referred to him during his last teaching to his disciples at the Last Supper.

Luke 22:36-37 He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. **37** It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."

Why did he have to suffer? Jesus suffered so that through his suffering, we may see an end to our suffering.

⁵ Barry Webb, The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wing, "forgivenessTransitions, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity-to-daymusty Press, 1996), 212-213.

Revelation 21:4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Segway to Small Group: Through Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice, we have eternal life and forgiveness of our sins. Through his sacrifice, our eternity has been changed. But the suffering of Jesus must also impact our day-to-day. How does Jesus’ suffering directly help us deal with our own suffering?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Leader Note (passage context): In this passage, the Apostle Peter is addressing slaves, specifically household slaves (*oiketai*) who had believed in Jesus Christ. In this passage, Peter is challenging the Christian slaves to submit to earthly authority. It is important to note that in the previous verses (vs 13-17), Peter had likewise challenged free Christians to do the very same thing so that God may be glorified. This context matters because it shows that Peter’s focus here is on the universal need for submission and on glorifying God regardless of circumstances. Peter’s objective in addressing slaves was not to condone or approve of the system of slavery or to give cruel slave owners a pass. Many believers at that time were slaves, and were suffering as slaves; therefore, Peter saw the need to address how they could glorify God in the midst of their suffering. While our suffering today may look vastly different than theirs, Peter’s words and Jesus’ example provide us with the same wisdom and hope in the midst of suffering.

READ: 1 Peter 2:18-25

1. Vs 21 - How does, or should, the reality that Jesus Christ suffered, specifically suffered for us, shape how we respond to difficulty and suffering?

Leader Note: We have a Savior who has suffered, grieved, and been tempted. Therefore, we should be honest when we seek him out in our prayers. As the author of Hebrews pointed out, we have a savior who not only sympathizes with our pain but also empathizes because he lived a lifetime in our shoes (Hebrews 4:15).

Leader Note: 1 Peter 2:22 is a direct quotation of Isaiah 53:9.

2. Jesus was able not to retaliate, despite the terrible pain and suffering people were putting him through, because “he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” What did Peter mean by that?

Leader Note: Jesus could trust that God the Father, who is the perfect judge, would rightly judge the wrong done to Him (Jesus). Likewise, the truth that God is the ultimate and perfect judge of all wrongs frees us to show mercy. It is not our job to avenge every wrong. That is God's job. He is vastly better at it than we will ever be. Paul expresses a similar teaching in Romans 12:7-21.

READ: 1 Peter 3:13-18

3. Vs 14 - How could we ever view suffering as a blessing as the Apostle Peter described it?

Leader Note: It is in our desperation and suffering that we come to the end of ourselves. That is why Jesus could boldly say, blessed are the poor, meek, and persecuted in the opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). James, the half-brother of Jesus, echoed a similar sentiment when he said, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”* (James 1:2-4).

4. How has a difficult season of your life grown you in your faith?
5. Vs 15 - How does suffering and hardship give us opportunities to give an answer for our faith that times of ease would not?
6. The Apostle Peter wanted the early church to know that following a suffering Savior meant viewing suffering in a vastly different way. Suffering is not by default God's punishment on us. Instead, it is the reality we face for following Jesus in a broken world. The question is: how do we seek the will of God in the midst of suffering rather than blaming God for it?

PRAYER TIME

DISMISS