

Isaiah 52:13-53:3 "The Servant Who Suffered"*

Main Idea: In Isaiah 52:13-53:3, the prophet made two predictions about the Messiah. Both predictions hold tremendous implications for our lives, as we'll see.

I. We see the honor of the Messiah (52:13-15).

A. He will act wisely (13a).

B. He will be exalted (13b).

C. Before this, however, He will suffer (14).

1. His appearance will be appalling.

2. His treatment will be inhumane.

D. In so doing, He will sprinkle the nations (15).

1. He will act as a priest.

2. He will act as a king.

II. We see the humiliation of the Messiah (53:1-3).

A. Here's what He did (1-2).

1. The King made himself vulnerable (2a).

2. The Majestic One became common (2b).

B. Here's what He endured (3).

1. The world despised Him.

2. The world rejected Him.

3. The world devalued Him.

Think about the Implications...

1. We must come to grips with what Jesus deserves.

2. We must come to grips with what Jesus desires.

3. We must do so today.

You have a masterpiece and may not even realize it. It's a picture that's priceless. No amount of money could touch it. It's actually a picture of Jesus, but it's unlike any other. The artist didn't use a paintbrush and colors, but a pen and words. It's a word-picture. This word-picture is endorsed by God Himself and recorded in the pages of holy Scripture. It's a picture that, having seen it, can change us forever.

What's amazing is that this picture was drawn over seven hundred years before Jesus came to the earth. It is a prophetic picture. God gave it to the world centuries before He sent His Son both as a prediction and as a preparation. "He's coming," this picture says. "And so you'll recognize Him when He arrives, here's what He will look like."

Sadly, though the picture could be no clearer, the world missed Him. And many are still missing Him.

That's why last week we began to examine the masterpiece in a series entitled, *The Sacrifice of the Savior*. Our aim is to do an expositional study of the prophetic picture of the Messiah recorded by Isaiah in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. In our first message we took a look at the frame of the picture, so to speak, and scanned the entire book of Isaiah to looking for glimpses of the Messiah. This morning, however, we will begin to examine the portrait in Isaiah 53 itself, line by line.

I must warn you of something. This picture is graphic. As we gaze at the portrait together we will see images that will grip our hearts and quite likely cause tears to well up in our eyes.

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down, now scornfully surrounded with thorns

Thine only crown.

How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn, how does that visage languish, which once was bright as morn!

Do you see His sacred Head, beloved? If you look at Isaiah's picture, you will.

The pace of this series will be different than many. My intent is to devote the next four weeks to examine these fifteen verses. We're not going to rush through this text, but follow its development line by line, marveling at its message word by word.

Isaiah begins the portrait with the command, "See." In the KJV, it's "Behold." And that's what we'll seek to do beginning today, to take a look—a close, careful look—at the portrait of the Messiah given by the prophet Isaiah.

Our text is part of the fourth and longest of the "servant" songs in Isaiah. It is the climax of the second section of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40-66), if not the entire book. Isaiah 53 has been called the "gospel of the Old Testament." It is quoted or referred to at least eighty-five times in the New Testament.

It's a text that can help us to see and get to know Jesus personally. For instance, in Acts 8:34, a man from Ethiopia was reading Isaiah 53 and asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" And according to the next verse, "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus (35)." And the Ethiopian's life was changed that day.

Such is the power of Isaiah 53. If you want to know Jesus, indeed, if you want to know Him *well*, then don't miss Isaiah 53. Become a student of this hallmark text. Memorize it in the weeks ahead. Ask the Holy Spirit to use it to transform your life.

Today we'll ponder the first section as follows. In Isaiah 52:13-53:3, the prophet made two predictions about the Messiah. Both predictions hold tremendous implications for our lives, as we'll see.

I. Prediction #1: We see the honor of the Messiah (52:13-15).

Listen to the prophet: "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—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—¹⁵ so will he 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."

In prediction #1, Isaiah highlights the honor of the Messiah. The Coming One is a King. He is a victor. He is royalty. Isaiah specifies four accomplishments relating to the *honor* of the Messiah.

A. He will act wisely (13a). "My servant will act wisely," God says through the prophet. He "shall deal prudently," is how the KJV translators rendered the phrase. What did God mean? The answer has to do with understanding the term "servant" in Isaiah, a word that Isaiah uses throughout his book.

In the eighth century B.C., the prophet Isaiah preached a twofold message. In chapters 1-39 he told his people judgment was coming—for a holy God must judge sin. Then in chapters 40-66 he preached a message of comfort—for a gracious God doesn't deal with sinners as they deserve.

But how can God be consistent with both His holiness and grace? How can He both judge sin and pardon sinners? Isaiah gives the answer beginning in Isaiah 52:13, "See, my servant will act wisely."

There's how God would do it, through the One He calls "my servant." We need some background to appreciate that title. The fact is, God chose Israel to be His *servant*. He selected Israel to do His bidding in the world.

But Israel kept failing. Over and over again, Israel blew it as God's servant. Instead of pleasing the Master, Israel did what we all do as sinners. Israel went its own way, powerless to change.

And then God in His mercy intervened. God made an announcement. He was going to send a representative into the world to act in Israel's place. This representative would be *The Servant*, and whereas the first servant (Israel) failed, this servant would succeed. He would fulfill the plan of God perfectly. Unlike foolish Israel, He will act *prudently*. He, Isaiah says, will *act wisely*.

What else will the Messiah, the Servant, do?

B. He will be exalted (13b). Specifically, "He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted."

Do those words sound familiar? On the day God called Isaiah to the ministry, He gave the prophet a vision of a most spectacular sight. Do you remember what it was? Isaiah described it in Isaiah 6:1, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, *high and exalted*, and the train of his robe filled the temple."

Isaiah saw the Lord. He saw Him sitting on His heavenly throne, *high and exalted*. That was in Isaiah 6. But now in Isaiah 52, he says that God's servant *will* be raised, lifted up, and highly exalted. This *will* happen—future tense. Where will that occur? He will be exalted not just in heaven, but on earth, too, as we'll see in a moment. Yes, He will be exalted.

C. Before this, however, He will suffer (14). Notice the flow of the text again, paying special attention to the tense of the verbs. Verse 13 says, "My servant *will* act wisely; he *will* be raised and lifted up and highly exalted." The exaltation will come. But according to the prophecy, something else will occur first.

Verse 14—"Just as there *were* many who were appalled at him—his appearance *was* so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness."

Notice the verbs—*were* and *was*, *appalled*, *disfigured*, and *marred*—all past tense. Isaiah is describing an event future to him that will precede the exaltation of the Messiah. Before the Servant is honored, He will suffer.

How bad will the affliction be? In a word, it's *unthinkable*. Isaiah describes two characteristics of His suffering.

1. *His appearance will be appalling*. In this prophetic announcement, Isaiah says many were "appalled" at Him. Astounded. And for good reason.

2. *His treatment will be inhumane*. According to Isaiah, The Servant is going to suffer such abuse that His appearance won't even be human-like. He will be "disfigured" beyond that of any man. His form will be marred beyond human likeness. The AV says, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."

This isn't Isaiah's first mention of the Messiah's inhumane treatment. Just two chapters earlier the prophet contrasted Israel's sin and The Servant's obedience. In Isaiah 50:6 he penned this statement by The Servant: "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face

from mocking and spitting."

In Bible times, people respected a man's beard. To pluck his beard was to show utter disdain for the person. For instance, in 2 Samuel 10 the Ammonites humiliated David's servants by shaving half of their beards.

Dear friends, the New Testament record is clear. What Isaiah predicted the Messiah endured. The treatment Jesus received was absolutely inhumane.

They slapped Him. They spit in His face. They buffeted Him. They struck Him with the palms of their hands (all recorded in Matt 26:67). In addition to this abuse, they hit Him on the head, scourged and whipped Him, and pummeled His flesh with the result being that He did not appear human.

Take another look at the terms "disfigured" and "marred" in verse 14. Those words are used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the kinds of animals that were unacceptable as sacrifices to God. A Jew could not offer a "blemished" animal to God.

But The Servant, though He Himself was acceptable—even perfect—would become unacceptable. Yet why? Why would God allow His chosen Servant to become as a blemished animal? Isaiah answers the question in verse 15—"So will he sprinkle many nations." There's the reason...

D. In so doing, He will sprinkle the nations (15). But what does that mean? Verse 15 predicts that when the Messiah comes He will fill two roles.

1. *He will act as a priest.* The term "sprinkle" has connections to the sacrificial system. It's what the priests did with animal sacrifices.

For example, consider what God told the Jewish priests to do with a sacrificed animal in Exodus 29:20-21, "Slaughter it, take some of its blood and put it on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. Then *sprinkle* blood against the altar on all sides. ²¹ And take some of the blood on the altar and some of the anointing oil and *sprinkle* it on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments. Then he and his sons and their garments will be consecrated."

If there's anything the Old Testament makes clear, it's this. To approach God, you must come on *His* terms, not your own. If you are a sinner—which includes all of us—you can't enter His presence until something happens. Your sins must be *covered*. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Lev 17:11)." There must be an atonement, a blood sacrifice, a *sprinkling*.

That's what the priests did in the Old Testament. They *sprinkled* the people. And Isaiah said that's what The Servant would do. He will *sprinkle*.

But wait. Whom will He sprinkle? Only the Jews? No. "He will sprinkle *many nations*." That's interesting. When God chose Israel in the first place, His intent was to use Israel to manifest His glory throughout the whole world. Yet Israel failed. Instead of displaying God's glory, servant-Israel distorted God's glory before the on-looking world.

But The Servant wouldn't fail. Isaiah says that as the result of His suffering, *He will sprinkle many nations*. He will act as a priest.

My friend, do you long to be clean before God? Or as the hymn-writer put it, would you be free from the burden of sin? If so, there's hope. There's power in the blood!

Would you be free from your passion and pride?

*There's pow'r in the blood; pow'r in the blood;
Come for a cleansing to Calvary's tide;
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.*

*Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood:
Sin stains are lost in the life-giving flow;
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.*

*There is pow'r, pow'r,
Wonder-working pow'r
In the blood of the Lamb;
There is pow'r, pow'r,
Wonder-working pow'r
In the precious blood of the Lamb.*

But Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would fulfill a second role. First, a priest...

2. *He will act as a king.* Notice the result of His "sprinkling" work. Verse 15 again—"So will he 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."

What did Isaiah say would happen? After The Servant finishes His work as *priest*, kings will shut their mouths because of Him. You see, there can be only one king, only one who has the final say. And if The Servant is king, all others must be silent. And the day is coming when they will be.

Please know this. The day is coming—as surely as the Messiah was once marred—that kings will shut their mouths and stop their boasting. And if that's what *kings* will do—the people who are the most powerful on the planet—what about the rest of us? Yes, *every* knee will bow and *every* tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10-11)! And it will happen just like Isaiah said it would more than 2,700 years ago.

In fact, it's already happening—at least in part. In Romans 15:21, the apostle Paul quoted Isaiah 52:15 to show why he was so passionate about taking the gospel to unreached people groups throughout the world of his day, so that Gentiles would glorify God—just as Isaiah said.

In the final verses of Isaiah 52, we see the *honor* of the Messiah. And then we come to Isaiah 53. It's here we see a second prediction...

II. Prediction #2: We see the humiliation of the Messiah (53:1-3).

Right after announcing what The Servant would do at the end of chapter 52, Isaiah begins chapter fifty-three with two questions, "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"

Notice the pronoun change. In the final verses of Isaiah 52, the words "he," "his," and "him" appear over and over. There will be a similar emphasis on third personal singular pronouns starting again in verse 7 through the end of the chapter. But in the first six verses of Isaiah 53, Isaiah switches from "he" and "him" to "we," "us," and "our." For instance, in the NIV you'll notice fourteen first person plural pronouns in this section.

The discussion in the first six verses of Isaiah 53 is very personal. Isaiah is going to describe the humiliation of the Messiah, but he does so in terms that draw us in. This humiliation had to do with us, as we'll see.

"Who has believed our message?" he begins. Remember, Isaiah just predicted that a day is coming when the kings of the earth are going to shut their mouths before God's Servant. He said The Servant would be highly exalted.

But who believes that? We're living in a world full of people who don't. The ACLU doesn't buy it. Osama bin Laden doesn't buy it. If you've never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you don't really believe it—or you'd submit your life to Him now before it's too late.

The apostle John actually quoted this verse in John 12:37-38 to explain the negative response of people to Jesus: "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him." ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

Paul, too, referenced Isaiah to explain the opposition he faced (Romans 10:16), "But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

The message may be hard to believe, but it's true. Isaiah predicted the Messiah's exaltation just like he predicted His humiliation. The former is yet future, the second has been fulfilled.

Beginning in verse 2, Isaiah presents the Suffering Servant. This is holy ground, beloved. We see in vivid, descriptive terms a portrait of our Savior. We learn two about His humiliation from two perspectives.

A. Here's what He did (1-2). Listen to verse 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."

In Isaiah's revelation, the Messiah did two things.

1. *The King made himself vulnerable (2a)*. Isaiah refers to the Messiah as a "tender shoot." That's not the first time. Back in 11:1, he made this prediction, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Jesse, of course, was King David's father. This prophecy indicates the Messiah, like a shoot from a stump, will come up from the lineage of David. He will be King.

But in chapter 53, we learn something peculiar about this coming King. Before He rules He will make Himself vulnerable. He will be like a tender shoot, that is, fragile and delicate; and like a root out of dry ground, that is, exposed to danger and unprotected.

In short, when the King first comes He will arrive not with a brilliant display of power, but in lowliness. He will do what is unthinkable for a King. He will make Himself vulnerable.

2. *The Majestic One became common (2b)*. Dear friend, contrary to many classic pieces of artwork, when Jesus came to earth, there was no halo around His head. Here is the true portrait: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."

In 1 Samuel 16:18, the word "beauty" is used to describe David to Saul. He was a "fine-looking, handsome" man. But according to Isaiah, Jesus did not have a striking appearance. There was nothing about Jesus that would have indicated this was the Son of God.

He had no "beauty"—He was robed in ordinary flesh. Nor did He possess a trace of "majesty"—one translation uses the word "lordliness." He was born in a stable, and raised in a peasant carpenter's home!

Let this sink in. Jesus looked like a man. Though He retained His deity, He was a man, an ordinary, common man—an unimpressive, lower-class man who had no earthly clout or connections. In His own words, He

"had no place to lay His head." When He died He had no money, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

Do you want to see a picture of the Messiah? There it is. There's what He did. The King of kings made Himself vulnerable and became common.

B. Here's what He endured (3). "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Notice what He endured. Isaiah uses three horrid verbs to depict His treatment.

1. *The world despised Him.* The term is repeated twice in verse 3. He was *despised*.

The prophet Daniel used this word in Daniel 11:21 to refer to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the hated persecutor of the Jews, the man who desecrated the Jewish temple in 165 B.C. by offering a pig on it. You can imagine what the Jews thought of him.

Isaiah says, "That's what they'll think of the Messiah. They'll *despise* Him."

2. *The world rejected Him.* If you despise something, you'll naturally try to get rid of it. And so it was with Jesus.

"What do you want me to do with Him?" Pilate asked the crowd concerning Jesus. Their reply? "Crucify Him!"

"But what has He done?" Pilate responded. "Do you want me to crucify your king?"

"We have no king but Caesar!" they shouted. "Crucify Him!" And so the world rejected Him. He became a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.

3. *The world devalued Him.* "We esteemed Him not," Isaiah said. The verb means "to think, regard, or value." When Messiah came, the world didn't think much of Him. In fact, it devalued Him.

But wait. It wasn't just the Jews who did this. *We* didn't esteem Him. *We* devalued Him. Oh, dear friend, ponder what He endured. And know this. He did so *for our benefit*. Listen to the words of Philip Bliss, penned with Isaiah 53 in mind.

*'Man of sorrows!' what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Seal'd my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Guilty vile, and helpless we,
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement! can it be?
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Lifted up was He to die,
'It is finished,' was His cry;
Now in heav'n exalted high,
Hallelujah, What a Savior!*

Philip Bliss is saying the same thing Isaiah said, isn't he? The *humiliation* of the Messiah came first. But of this we can be sure. The exaltation, the *honor*, is coming! Indeed...

*When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing,
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

Think about the Implications...

I'll mention three.

1. *We must come to grips with what Jesus deserves.* He is the King! And as King, He deserves *honor*. Are you giving Him what He deserves?

The famous missionary, David Livingstone, once said, "People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply acknowledging a great debt we owe to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny? It is emphatically no sacrifice. Rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, danger, foregoing the common conveniences of this life--these may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing compared with the glory which shall later be revealed in and through us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk, when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father's throne on high to give Himself for us."

2. *We must come to grips with what Jesus desires.* He gave His life to "sprinkle many nations." In light of what His sacrifice, how can we coast along in self-centered silence? Jesus wants the Good News to be spread to the nations. It's our job—rather, it's our *privilege*—to invest our lives making known the good news about Him.

Are you doing what Jesus desires with your life? Are there things in your life that aren't pleasing to Him? O friends, we must come to grips with what Jesus *deserves* and what Jesus *desires*. When?

3. *We must do so today.* We mustn't delay.