

"The Messiah through the Eyes of Isaiah"*

Proposition: Isaiah the prophet can give us a fresh appreciation for Jesus. He enables us to see the Messiah from two perspectives.

I. We see the Messiah when we look at the big picture in Isaiah.

A. In chapters 1-39, Isaiah pinpointed man's problem.

1. People are sinners (1:2-4).
2. A holy God must judge sin (5:11-13).

B. In chapters 40-66, Isaiah predicted God's solution.

1. God would comfort His people (40:1-2).
2. God would change His people (43:1).

II. We see the Messiah when we look at the details in Isaiah.

A. The Messiah is a King (7:14; 9:6).

1. We're told how He would come.
2. We're told what He would do.

B. The Messiah is the Revealer of God (40:3-5).

1. God revealed His glory through the return from exile.
2. God ultimately revealed His glory through His Son.

C. The Messiah is the Servant (42:1-4).

1. God's first servant failed.
2. The Messiah would be the Servant who would succeed.

D. The Messiah is a Lamb (53:4-7).

1. As King, He came to rule.
2. As the Glory of God, He came to reveal.
3. As the Servant, He came to restore.
4. As the Lamb, He came to rescue.

Make It Personal: What place does the Messiah have in your life?

John Newton was a rough, dirty sailor with a foul mouth and an appetite for rotten living. He hated life and life hated him. He was captain of a slave ship. Then someone placed in his hands a copy of Thomas a Kempis' The Imitation of Christ. He also had the gift of a good mother who told him about the Savior when he was young.

Then he was saved. He went all over England sharing his faith. Well past his "retirement" age, he had to have an assistant stand in the pulpit with him on Sundays. He was nearly blind and spoke in whispers, but nothing could keep him from preaching while he still had breath.

One Sunday, while delivering his message he repeated the sentence: "Jesus Christ is precious." His helper whispered to him: "But you have already said that twice." Newton turned to his helper and said loudly, "Yes, I've said it twice, and I'm going to say it again." And so the grand old preacher said again: "Jesus Christ is precious!"

He is precious, isn't He? He's "the fairest of ten thousand," as the hymnwriter put it. "All that thrills my soul is Jesus, He is more than life to me." Yes, He's more than life.

I want to know Jesus better. I believe you do, too. That's why you're here today. To help us grow in our knowledge of Him and what He did for us, we're beginning a new series this morning, entitled, "***The Sacrifice of the Savior.***"

What really happened when the Savior gave His life on the Cross? Perhaps no text in the Bible answers that question more powerfully and vividly than a text written more than seven hundred years before Jesus died, the prophetic text of Isaiah 53. Our aim in the weeks ahead is to do a verse by verse exposition of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Next time we'll begin our journey through this hallmark text, with sermons entitled:

"The Servant Who Suffered" (52:13-53:3)

"Dying as a Substitute" (53:4-6)

"Silent to the Last Breath" (53:7-9)

"His Pain, Our Gain" (53:10-12)

Sadly, many people have a very superficial perception of Jesus. My prayer is that God will use this series to change that. And the prince of the prophets, *Isaiah*, can certainly help us. The name of Isaiah alone appears some thirteen times in the gospels, not to mention scores of other indirect references to the book he wrote.

Did you realize we can see Jesus in Isaiah's book? In an amazing statement in John 12:41, the apostle John says we can. After quoting from Isaiah 6:10, John wrote, "Isaiah said this because he saw *Jesus'* glory and spoke about *him*."

Did you catch that? The Bible says that Isaiah—a man who lived over seven centuries B.C.—that Isaiah saw Jesus! But not only did Isaiah see Jesus, he also spoke about Jesus. And wrote about Jesus—in the book that bears his name.

My friend, we have an invaluable resource that can give us a fresh perspective of Jesus. Isaiah was an expert on Jesus, and his book is a written record that points us to the Messiah.

Our aim in today's study is to see the Messiah through the eyes of Isaiah. Isaiah the prophet can offer us a fresh appreciation for Christ. He enables us to see the Messiah from two perspectives.

I. We see the Messiah when we look at the big picture in Isaiah.

In preparation for the actual investigation of Isaiah 53, we're going to scan the book of Isaiah this morning looking for clues, for glimpses of Christ. We will but scratch the surface of the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah, but will gain a big picture perspective that will prepare us to appreciate *the sacrifice of the Savior* described in Isaiah 53.

Yes, when we take a panoramic view of Isaiah's book, we can see the Messiah. In fact, we must see the big picture before we look at the details. Basically, there are two scenes in Isaiah's big picture.

A. In chapters 1-39, Isaiah pinpointed man's problem. God called Isaiah to the ministry at an interesting time in Israel's history. In the middle of the 8th century B.C., there was a combination of economic prosperity and spiritual apathy. God had blessed His people, but they failed to respond with gratefulness to Him. The theme of the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah's book is judgment, and in it, the prophet pinpointed the problem. By the way, the twofold problem that plagued Isaiah's people holds true for all people.

1. *People are sinners (1:2-4)*. Isaiah speaks for God, "Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. ³ The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." ⁴ Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him."

Here's the first part of the problem Isaiah saw. People are sinners. Even an ox knows his master, but Israel didn't know. Time and time again, God's people abandoned the Lord Who loved them. Time and time again, they chose to live for themselves instead of for God. Isaiah described the problem further in 1:21-23:

"See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her—but now murderers! ²² Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. ²³ Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them."

Know this. Helping people who can't help themselves is very important to God. We are dangerously missing the mark if we fail to care for widows, for orphans, even for the unborn in their time of need. God hates the attitude of people who are so preoccupied with themselves that they refuse to help others who can't help in return.

Self-centeredness is the essence of sin. But that's what Isaiah saw all around him in Judah in 720 B.C. I wonder what he'd write about America in 2001?

The following story illustrates the twisted nature of our problem. During a burglary in New York, a store owner shot and wounded the man who was robbing his shop. The injured burglar took the owner to court, where his attorney told a jury his client was a victim of society, driven to crime by economic disadvantages. The lawyer also claimed his client was a victim of the store owner who shot him--Because of that mans' disregard for the thief's plight, the poor criminal will be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He deserves compensation, the attorney said. The jury agreed, and demanded the store owner pay a large settlement. Ironically, several months later the same man, in his wheelchair, was arrested while committing another armed robbery.

My friend, we are not *victims*. We are *sinners*. All people are, including us. Blaming others doesn't alter the fact. Isaiah said our problem is twofold--here's the second part.

2. *A holy God must judge sin (5:11-13)*. There are consequences to sin. With a broken heart, no doubt, Isaiah told his people what they could expect in 5:11-13:

"Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine [sound familiar?]. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of His hands. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding."

And, as you may well know, into exile they went. In 722 B.C. the northern tribes of Israel were carried away to Assyria, and in 586 B.C. the southern tribes left in chains for Babylon. They learned the lesson the hard way. A holy God must judge sin.

Don't miss what Isaiah said some 2,700 years ago. Mankind has a problem, a problem that hasn't changed since Isaiah's day. We are sinners, and a holy God must judge sin. Isaiah reiterates that truth over and over throughout the first scene of his book. Thankfully, there's a second scene.

B. In chapters 40-66, Isaiah predicted God's solution. What is God's solution for man's problem? In prophetic terms, Isaiah predicted that God would do two things.

1. *God would comfort His people (40:1-2)*. The first thirty-nine chapters reverberate with the theme of justice, but the tone changes to a note of hope beginning in chapter 40. At the very time His people were facing judgment, God told Isaiah to assure them that exile would not be the end. And so the prophet spoke in Isaiah 40:1-2:

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."

God doesn't give up on His people. Aren't you glad of that?! Yes, because of His righteousness He must deal with sin, and yet, due to His mercy, He extends comfort to the sinner. In the case of Isaiah's people, that meant a return from exile. After seventy years in Babylon, He would bring comfort to the Jews by bringing them back home (40:3-5).

But that's not all. Isaiah also predicted that God would do something else.

2. *God would change His people (43:1)*. "But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.'"

Did you catch that? Even before the judgment occurred, God said He would restore His wayward people. He promised He would bring them back to the Promised Land. He said He would change them.

But how would He do it? How ultimately would God transform His wayward people and form a people for His glory? How would He take them from where they *were* to where they *needed to be*?

Parents, do you ever ask that question as you seek to raise your children? For that matter, do you ever ask that question as you look at *your own life*? How is God going to take us from where we are to where we need to be? In prophetic terms, Isaiah tells us. God does it *through the Messiah*.

The truth is, we have a problem. We are born as sinners under the judgment of God, and we can't do a thing about it. But, Isaiah says that God designed a plan to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves, a plan He would fulfill through the Messiah. Now we're ready for the close-up view.

II. We see the Messiah when we look at the details in Isaiah.

Remember, John said that Isaiah saw the preincarnate Jesus. Let's see if we can find Him in Isaiah this morning. As we scan Isaiah's book, we find a massive amount of material about the Messiah. We could easily get lost in the details, so we'll be selective and look at four pictures Isaiah used to present the Christ.

A. The Messiah is a King (7:14; 9:6). What kind of king? In Isaiah, we're given two prophecies concerning His royalty.

1. *We're told how He would come*. The reference is the familiar Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the LORD Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

We usually look at Isaiah 7:14 through the eyes of the New Testament writer, Matthew. And that's fine since Matthew quoted this prophecy, but first we need to look at what the prophecy meant in its historical context.

Look at Isaiah 7. Ahaz was king in Judah at the time (1). He was a bad king at a bad time. A Syrian alliance was threatening to replace Ahaz with another king. Why was that a problem? It was a threat to the Davidic covenant and lineage. Ahaz was in trouble!

Guess what God did? He told Isaiah to go to Ahaz (3) and tell the king not to worry. Furthermore, God told Ahaz to ask for a sign to prove that He would protect His people (11). How did Ahaz respond? He said (12), "I will not ask (for a sign). I will not put the LORD to the test."

Was Ahaz being noble? Hardly. Just the opposite! He didn't want to believe God's Word. In fact, he was working on his own scheme. He intended to appeal to Tiglath Pilezer, king of Assyria, for help. How did Isaiah respond? In essence, he told him (13-14), "You'll get a sign anyway! The Lord Himself will give you a sign."

The "you" in verse 14, however, is plural, for the sign was not only for Ahaz, but for the entire nation of Judah. What was the sign? A baby boy would be born of a virgin (14). He would be raised in a time of national calamity (15). Before the child grew up, the threat facing Judah would be gone (16). Don't miss that final detail.

I believe there are two levels of fulfillment to the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. We see an immediate fulfillment in 8:3 where a son is born to Isaiah's wife. On the day Isaiah stood before Ahaz (in 7:14), he was betrothed to a virgin who later bore him a son (in 8:3). In 8:18 Isaiah said his children were "signs." One child was an initial fulfillment of 7:14.

But the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, according to Matthew 1:23, referred to the virgin Mary's conception of the Messiah. Did Ahaz know that? I doubt it. Did Isaiah know the sign pointed ultimately to the Messiah? I think so because of a second prophecy Isaiah gave concerning the Messiah King.

2. *We're told what He would do. Where?* In Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

One of Israel's greatest problems was the failure of its leaders. Kings like Ahaz came and went. Even good kings like David and Hezekiah came and went. God's people needed a king that wouldn't fail. And Isaiah said, "He's coming!"

What would this king do? Isaiah tells us in 9:7, "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this."

My friend, Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would do what no other world leader would ever do—establish justice and righteousness *forever!* That's because the Messiah is *the* King. Yes, our world needs peace. Our hearts need peace. And peace can be ours when—and only when—we submit to the King.

Now, a second picture. According to Isaiah...

B. The Messiah is the Revealer of God (40:3-5). Let's take a look at Isaiah 40:3, a text Matthew quotes in Matthew 3:3. In it, we learn two things about the Messiah as the Revealer of God.

1. *God revealed His glory through the return from exile.* That's the immediate anticipation of the prophecy in Isaiah 40. Notice verses 3-5:

"A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'"

Amazing! Isaiah predicted that a day was coming when the glory of the Lord would be revealed for all men to see. Now a question. When did that happen? The answer is, God revealed His glory when He brought the Jews back from exile in Babylon. That's the context of Isaiah 40. This text looks ahead to that marvelous display of God bringing His people back home. But indeed, that was just "warm-up" work for God.

2. *God ultimately revealed His glory through His Son.* Matthew quoted Isaiah 40:3 and said it referred to John the Baptist. How so? It's as if Matthew is saying, "Listen, if the return of the Jews from exile revealed God's glory, *how much more* did the ministry of John the Baptist. It was John's privilege to preach and call people to get ready to see *the* glory of God!

I don't know if we've thought of it in these terms often enough, but *Jesus is the glory of God.* He is the *Revealer of God.*

"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His *glory*, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)." Hebrews 1:3 states, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being."

Do you want to know God? Then get to know the Messiah, Jesus. He is the Revealer.

C. The Messiah is the Servant (42:1-4). The "servant" theme is central to Isaiah's message. The term appears twenty-five times. If you trace the word through the book, two truths will emerge.

1. *God's first servant failed.* Who was God's first servant? According to 41:8-9, Israel was, "But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, ⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you."

What's a servant supposed to do? A servant is to do whatever his master desires, right? Israel was God's servant, but Israel failed. Why? Israel failed for the same reason we fail. We don't have the ability to do what God our Master asks of us. Our good intentions are just that--good *intentions*. We lack the power to please God on our own.

Is there hope? Yes! Because of a second truth in Isaiah about the "servant."

2. *The Messiah would be the Servant who would succeed.* Listen to the prediction Isaiah recorded in 42:1-4, "Here is *my servant*, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."

Who is Isaiah describing here? It's *the* Servant, he says. It's the meek one (2), the bringer of justice (3), the dependable one (4), the one who would be a light for the Gentiles (6). It's Jesus. Jesus is the Servant who came to succeed where we failed (Matt 20:28).

But how did Isaiah say the Messiah would accomplish this? A fourth picture...

D. The Messiah is a Lamb (53:4-7). And now we come to our text.

We read in 52:13, "See, my *servant* will act wisely." Stop there. How did Isaiah say the Servant would act wisely? He gives the answer in Isaiah 53. It's there Isaiah predicted the Servant would become a *Lamb*.

This is sacred ground, beloved, ground that we'll be walking on in future weeks. Allow me at this time simply to read a portion of it. Here is what Isaiah said the Lamb would do (53:4-7):

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten 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 upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his 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 her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

Behold the Lamb of God, my friend! The Messiah is a lamb.

Hear the story from God's Word that kings and priests and prophets heard;

There would be a sacrifice and blood would flow to pay sin's price.

On the cross God loved the world while all the powers of hell were hurled;

No one there could understand the One they saw was Christ the Lamb.

Precious Lamb of glory, love's most wondrous story.

Heart of God's redemption of man;

Worship the Lamb of glory.

My friend, is this who you think of when you ponder Jesus? Do you see Him as the King, the Revealer of God, the Servant, and the Lamb? Let there be no misunderstanding. If we view Jesus the way Isaiah did, it will transform our lives. Radically transform them.

Allow me to spell out what these pictures should mean in our lives.

1. *As King, He came to rule.* This speaks of His sovereignty. Right now Jesus rules His kingdom in heaven. A day is coming when He will establish His kingdom and rule on earth. The question for us to face is this. Does Jesus rule in our lives today? Have you bowed your heart to Him?

2. *As the Glory of God, He came to reveal.* This speaks of His significance. Are you searching for meaning in life? Look no further than Jesus. He is the Revealer of the glory of God!

3. *As the Servant, He came to restore.* The Servant-picture speaks of His submission. Jesus did not come to do His own thing, but to do the Father's will. He came to restore us to God. Are you grateful for what He did?

4. *As the Lamb, He came to rescue.* This speaks of His substitution. Jesus can rescue us because He took our place. He died the death we deserved to die, and then rose again. He came to rescue us.

Someone has well said, "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent

us an entertainer; But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior."

Make It Personal: What place does the Messiah have in your life?

Beloved, when we look at the Messiah through the eyes of Isaiah, we see the King, the Revealer of God, the Servant, and the Lamb. The question is this. What place does Messiah Jesus have in *your* life?