

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. See the Messiah’s honor (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. See the Messiah’s humiliation (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 come to grips with Jesus today.

It’s one thing to know about Jesus, to be familiar with some facts about Him. It’s quite another to really know Him. I want to know Him, and I want you to know Him too. That’s what this new series is all about.

You have a masterpiece and may not even realize it. No amount of money could touch it. It’s a picture of Jesus, but it’s unlike any other. The artist didn’t use a paintbrush and colors. He used a pen and words. This picture is so vivid that it can change us forever.

Interestingly, the artist drew this particular picture seven hundred years before Jesus came to the earth. In His grace God gave the world a portrait of His Son so we’d recognize Him when He arrived.

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

On the last Sunday of this month we will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. Christ arose! Yet who is this One who conquered the grave, and why was He in the tomb in the first place?

During the four Sundays of April we’re going to take a close look at Isaiah’s masterpiece in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in a series entitled, *Gazing at the Suffering Servant*. I must warn you. This picture is graphic. As we ponder this portrait together we will see images that ought to grip our hearts and 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,*

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

which once was bright as morn!

We're going to see His sacred Head, beloved. And I want you to know up front that the pace of this series will be intentionally slow. We're going to devote four messages to the examination of fifteen verses. I don't want us to rush through Isaiah's text, but to follow its development line by line, marveling at its message word by word.

I urge you to memorize this passage this month. It will help you know your Savior better.

Isaiah begins the portrait with a command. "See," he says in 52:13. In the KJV, it's "Behold." And that's what we're going to do. We're going to take a look—a close, careful look—at an inspired portrait of the Messiah penned by the prophet Isaiah.

Our text is part of the fourth and longest of the "servant" songs in Isaiah.¹ This fourth servant song 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.

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 spend time in Isaiah 53. Ask the Holy Spirit to use it to open your eyes to see Jesus.

Let me give you the text and titles of all four messages...

"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)

We're going to begin to gaze at Isaiah's portrait today by looking at Isaiah 52:13-53:3. Here the prophet invites us to fix our gaze on two of the Messiah's features.

I. See the Messiah's honor (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—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 his first prediction, Isaiah indicates that the One who is coming is a king. He is a victor. He is royalty. Specifically, Isaiah mentions four accomplishments relating to the *honor* of the Messiah.

A. He will act wisely (13a). "My servant will act wisely," God says through His prophet. He "shall deal prudently" is how the KJV translators rendered the phrase. What does that 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.

¹ The four servant songs are 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12.

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 manifest 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."

Here's how God will do it, says Isaiah, 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 said He was going to send a representative into the world to act in Israel's place. This representative would be *The Servant*. 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. And now in Isaiah 52, he says that God's servant *will* be raised, lifted up, and highly exalted. This *will* happen, future tense. And where will it occur? He will be exalted not just in heaven, but on earth, too, as we'll see in a moment.

But this is an unusual king. Yes, He will be exalted, without a doubt. Yet...

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 says, "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 this affliction be? In a word, it's *unthinkable*. Isaiah describes Messiah's suffering in two ways.

1. *His appearance will be appalling.* Isaiah says many were "appalled" at Him. Here's how one Hebrew dictionary defines the term *appalled*: "to be horrified, terrified, dismayed, i.e., have an emotion or attitude of horror and great fear, implying also dismay and discouragement."² That's the effect His appearance will have on observers. *Appalling*. But that's not all. According to the picture...

2. *His treatment will be inhumane.* Isaiah says that The Servant is going to suffer such abuse that His appearance won't even be human-like. He will be "disfigured"

² DBL Hebrew #9037, taken from *Logos*.

beyond that of any man. As the AV puts it, “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 with The Servant’s obedience. In Isaiah 50:6 he recorded the words of 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 off half of their beards.³

Dear friends, what Isaiah predicted, the Messiah endured. The New Testament record is clear. 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, they hit Him on the head, scourged and whipped Him, and pummeled His flesh with the result being that He no longer appeared 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). What does that mean? The language indicates that when the Messiah comes He will fulfill 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—and that includes all of us—you can’t enter His presence until something happens. Your sins must be *covered by blood*. “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. Who will He sprinkle? Only the Jews? No. “He will sprinkle *many nations*.” That’s interesting. When God first chose Israel, 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.

³ Observation by Arthur Walton, *Portraits of Christ in Isaiah*, p. 84.

But this Servant won't fail. Isaiah says that as the result of His suffering, He will fulfill the role of the perfect priest and *will sprinkle many nations*.⁴

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, I have good news for you! Sing it with me...

*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.*

Yet there's a second role. He's not just a priest. Isaiah announced that the Messiah...

2. *He will act as a king*. Take a look at the result of His "sprinkling" work mentioned in verse 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."

What did Isaiah say would happen? He said that after The Servant finishes His work as *priest*, kings will shut their mouths because of Him. When does a king shut his mouth? When he's in the presence of one greater, right? There can be only one king, only one who has the final say. And if The Servant is king, all others must be silent in His presence. And know this. The day is coming when they will be.

It's true. The day is coming—as surely as the Messiah was once marred—that the kings of the earth 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 predicted it would twenty-seven centuries 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. Listen to Paul, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand' (Rom. 15:20-

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

21).” That’s why Paul was a missionary. So that Gentiles would glorify God, just as Isaiah said they would.

I need to share a burden with you. I’ve been looking at our missionary board recently. We have a wonderful team of some twenty missionaries, but look at their pictures and what do you see? A lot of gray and white hair. Almost all of them are over the age of forty, and most are in their fifties and up. Where’s the next generation of missionaries who will say, “I want to be a part of seeing the fulfillment of Isaiah 52:15? I challenge you teens and twenty-somethings. You’ve got a whole life in front of you. Should God so choose, why not invest it so that a people group not yet told about Him will see? Let’s pray to that end, church family! O Lord, send another generation of laborers into Your harvest field, so that Your Son will receive the honor He deserves.

That’s what we see when we gaze at the final verses of Isaiah 52, the *honor* of the Messiah. Then we come to Isaiah 53 where we’re confronted with something else.

II. See the Messiah’s humiliation (53:1-3).

Isaiah begins chapter fifty-three with two questions, “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

You’ll notice a 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 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.” In the NIV, for instance, I count fourteen first person plural pronouns in this section.

That’s because the discussion in the first six verses of Isaiah 53 is very personal. Isaiah is describing the humiliation of the Messiah, but he does so in terms that draw us in. This humiliation had to do with us.

“Who has believed our message?” he begins verse 1. 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, that’s Jesus the Christ, would be highly exalted.

But who believes that? We’re living in a world full of people who don’t. The atheist, Richard Dawkins, doesn’t buy it. North Korea’s dictator, Kim Jong Il, certainly doesn’t. The Islamic terrorist doesn’t. But the fact is, if you’ve never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you don’t really believe it either, 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. Just listen, “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, likewise, referenced this Isaiah text to explain the opposition he faced as he presented the gospel, “But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message (Rom. 10:16)?’”

My friend, while the message may be hard to believe, it’s nonetheless true. Isaiah predicted the Messiah’s exaltation just like he predicted His humiliation. The former is yet future, the latter took place in the first century.

Beginning in verse 2, Isaiah presents the Suffering Servant. We're on holy ground, beloved, for here we're walking up close to the portrait of our Savior and we're seeing His humiliation. Isaiah shows us in two ways.

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 here in chapter 53, we're told something peculiar about this coming King. Before He rules He will make Himself vulnerable. He will be like a tender shoot, in other words, fragile and delicate. And He will grow up 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 and weakness. He will do what is unthinkable for a King. He will make Himself vulnerable. What's more...

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. He didn't glow either except when He was transfigured on the mount. No, here is His 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' appearance that would have indicated that He 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.

So if 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 suffered. Isaiah uses three powerful verbs.

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.

There's one more verb. "We esteemed Him not," says Isaiah. In other words...

3. *The world devalued Him.* The verb "esteem" means "to think, regard, or value." When Messiah came, the world didn't think much of Him. It wasn't impressed with Him, especially not once He made His true intentions known.

And let this sink in. It wasn't just the Jews who did this. *We* didn't esteem Him. *We* devalued Him, and we did it because He's not the kind of Messiah we wanted. Yet He didn't shrink back. He endured it all, and He did so *for our benefit*.

Philip Bliss said it well, 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 said the same thing Isaiah said, didn't he? The *humiliation* of the Messiah came first, terrible, unthinkable, undeserved humiliation. Yet 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.* What does He deserve? He is the King, right? And as King, He deserves *honor*. How do you honor Him? First, by putting your trust in Him. He suffered and died because in His assessment, you need a Savior. You need your sins removed. Will you agree with His assessment and accept Him as the King who came to save *you*?

And that's just the beginning. You honor Him by believing in Him, obeying Him, submitting your life to Him, giving Him your heart's loyalty and devotion.

So answer this. Are you giving Him what He deserves?

I challenged you, young people, to consider being a vocational missionary. Listen to what another 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." He desires for the people groups of the world to benefit from the blood He shed.

Do you desire what He desires? Be honest. Jesus wants the Good News to be spread to the nations. Is that what you want? Brothers and sisters, it's our job—rather, it's our great *privilege*—to invest our time and money and energy to make it known, to our neighbors and to the nations, what He has done.

So answer this. Are you doing what Jesus wants you to be doing with your life? Are you living to make Him known? O friends, we must come to grips with what Jesus *deserves* and what Jesus *desires*.

And let me spell out one final implication.

3. *We must come to grips with Jesus today.* Not tomorrow, but *today*. Don't delay. You need more incentive? Look again at His picture. See Him suffering in utter humiliation. He endured it all out of His love for us. Today is the day to join the ranks of those who give Him the honor He deserves.