

Behold, My Servant, the Man of Sorrows – Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

Introduction – There has been all of this language of God’s unstoppable power to redeem His people and defeat His enemies, to bring forth His Servant Who would deliver the captives. The strong arm of the Lord had been summoned (51:9), and God had promised to bare His holy arm before all nations (52:10). When He is revealed, it is not what Zion expected – or even desired.

The Servant Exalted (52:13-15) – His plan is full of the wisdom of God but it comes as a paradox. He is exalted and lifted up, but as one marred and mangled *more than any man* (lit. “Adam”), or *the sons of Adam*. But verse 15 tells us that this is how He would *sprinkle many nations*. Ceremonial sprinkling (of blood or water) was an act which declared the participation of one in the benefits of a sacrifice. This ceremonial washing was God’s declaration of making one clean through the substitutionary sacrifice of another. And so we see (again) that Christ crucified was never for one tiny political state, nor for a small smattering of many nations. The kings themselves will have their mouths (arguments) shut; they and their nations will “*see*” and “*hear and consider*” Christ crucified. Now the prophet steps back to explain how this will come to be.

The Servant Despised (53:1-3) – Who would have believed this story (v1)? The promised Branch does not come in great parade; He is born in relative poverty and obscurity (v2a). There was nothing in His life or appearance that would draw our attention (v2b). And, hanging on the Tree, He is the opposite of the Tree of Life in appearance. Eve saw the Tree, that it was pleasant and desirable (Gen 3). Christ had become “formless” or “faceless” as He hung on the Cross, fruitless, crowned with thorns. And so, He was despised and rejected; none of His disciples save one witnessed His crucifixion. And this is true of the Gospel message today. Proclaimed rightly, it is a scandal, a stumbling block, and foolishness to Jew and Greek alike (1 Cor 1:23). The Jews were not alone in crucifying the Messiah. We all put Jesus to death.

The Servant our Sin-Bearer (53:4-6) – And yet, here is the Gospel, the Good News. Here is the Servant who bears our sufferings vicariously. This is the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. We despised the “*Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief*” only to find out that those are our griefs and sorrows laid on Him (vv3-4). It is as though we were looking at a portrait that we thought was the most horrid person we had ever seen, only to realize that we were actually looking in a mirror. When we look to the Cross with faith what do we see? We see our sin and the just cursing of it and us (Gal 3:13). And then we put the sign of that death-curse on top of our churches or hang them around our necks. Why? Because “*by His stripes, we are healed*” (2 Cor 5:21, 8:9, 1 Pet 2:24-25). Like sheep, we have all gone astray, denying the Lord and wandering from Him. We all turn to our own way (become our own little gods). And because of this horrid act of rebellion (that leads to unceasing and innumerable iniquities), “*the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*” That is the Gospel.

The Servant Oppressed and Afflicted (53:7-9) – The Servant is also like a sheep, but in a different way. He is submissive to the end, even to His death on the Cross (Phil 2:5-8). This was not a capitulation in weakness but an exercise of deliberate control. While He could have defended Himself, having no sin or charges to be brought against Him, “*He opened not His mouth*” because He actually had no defense with regard to our sin which He was now bearing. We are the ones with no excuse – and so He was silent. Speaking in parallels, we should note that it is the “wicked rich” who placed Him in the grave. Of course, that was the position of the Sanhedrin that had condemned Jesus (and all who make an idol of their wealth). But one of their own who was just and had become a follower of Jesus is mentioned in the Gospels as providing a grave for the Lord (Luke 23:50-53).

The Servant Who Justifies and Intercedes (53:10-12) – A tear did not fall from heaven when Jesus died on the cross. “*It pleased the LORD to bruise Him...and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand*” (also Heb 12:2). Why? Because the labor of the Servant on the cross satisfied the wrath of God and provided the only Way of reconciliation for man (John 1:29, 1 John 2:1-2). The oppression of the cross was the will of God and accomplished the will of God (Acts 4:27-28). In His resurrection, Jesus declares the justification of His people and is given the nations (v12, Psalm 2:8).

The Crux of the Matter – This is how Jesus is both the Suffering Servant and the strong arm of the Lord. This is how He is both the Man of Sorrows and full of joy. This is how His death is a declaration of victory along with His resurrection. And this is why the world will be saved (2 Cor 5:18-21). The Cross is the place where the world changed forever. Politics will not save the world. Social action will not save the world. Nothing else will save the world. The vicarious sufferings of the Christ brought forth the salvation of the world.