

The Suffering Servant

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[0 : 00] God's Word with you. And if you don't know and can't tell by my accent, I am from the United States.

And when I worked in the United States prior to my years at university, I worked in the restaurant industry. I was a server. And it's interesting to see the different people who work in the restaurant industry.

There are those who love the industry. They can't wait to arrive at work. They can't wait to meet people, get to know them, recommend food to them.

And then there are people who can't stand it. They complain. They look to actively sabotage the restaurant and cause problems.

And that second group is usually let go pretty quickly. Because the restaurant doesn't want them misrepresenting what the restaurant stands for. So in our sermon series leading up to Easter, we've been looking at different Old Testament images of Christ.

[1 : 09] We've seen how God provided a sacrifice for Abraham and Isaac. And how God instituted the Passover meal for Israel to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt.

And we've seen the Day of Atonement when all the sins of Israel were atoned for. Last Sunday, Bongo preached on Psalm 22 and how Jesus cried out those words when he hung on the cross. Today, we're going to look at our final image. That of the suffering servant in Isaiah 52, 13 through 53, verse 12. So if you could open your Bibles and turn there.

The suffering servant in this passage is one of the most important portraits that we have of Jesus' person and work. Now before we read this passage, I want to briefly set the scene.

This is written by the prophet Isaiah, which you might see me jumping back and forth between the U.S. pronunciation and South African pronunciation.

[2 : 09] So I apologize for that in advance. But Isaiah was a prophet who ministered in Judah before the exile to Babylon. During the reigns of King Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

You can go back and read about what Israel was like during that time in the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. And as you read those books, you quickly see that Israel was a mess.

They were worshipping idols. They were oppressing people. They were not living as God's servants. When Israel was called out of Egypt, God called them to be his servants.

To represent his name before the watching world. But Israel failed. So God sent prophets to warn Israel of their sin.

And Isaiah was one such prophet. In this book, he warns Judah that they have rejected God's blessings. And have lived like the nations. Therefore, he's going to bring the nations in and conquer them as judgment.

[3 : 15] However, Isaiah constantly tells them that God will save a remnant of the people. That he will bless that remnant. And even more shocking, God is going to save the nations themselves.

And how is he going to do this? How is he going to accomplish this salvation? How is he going to turn iniquitous rebels into righteous servants?

Well, today's passage begins to answer how God will do that. In today's passage, Isaiah is going to paint the picture of God's own suffering servant. And as we read today's passage, we're going to ask, how does Isaiah describe God's servant?

How does Isaiah describe God's servant? As we read and ask that question, we're going to see that God's servant is a sacrifice and a sovereign.

And by being a sacrifice and sovereign, he saves sinful rebels. So, with that in mind, let's read together Isaiah 52, 12 through 53, 13.

[4 : 24] Remember, this is God's word. See, my servant will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him, his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being, and his form marred beyond human likeness.

He will sprinkle many nations. So he will sprinkle many nations. And the 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. Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 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. 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. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering.

[5 : 36] Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him.

And by his wounds we are healed. 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.

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 its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

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.

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. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer.

[6 : 44] 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. 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. 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 the word of the Lord. Let's pray together and ask God to bless the preaching of his word.

Almighty God, this is your word for us today.

We ask that your spirit would guide us in truth. Open our ears to your voice, and open our eyes to see your Son, our Savior. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

[7 : 48] Amen. So, how does Isaiah describe God's servant? Well, he describes his servant as a sacrifice. Now, as a warning, I'm not going to be able to cover everything in this passage.

It's so full of theological significance, and the New Testament itself is basically an exposition of this set of verses. But I'm going to touch on the high points. So, look with me at verses 13 through 15. Isaiah writes, So, at the beginning of this prophecy, Isaiah describes God's servant as someone who will be exalted, who will be lifted up.

This is a description of glory, like a king. This is kingly language, and often it is used throughout the Bible to describe God. In fact, Isaiah himself, in Isaiah chapter 6, uses that to describe the Holy One of Israel.

But then, in the next phrase, Isaiah describes this glorious person. God's servant is disfigured. He is marred and battered.

[9 : 14] He's so battered that he doesn't even look human. God is exalting a bloody pulp. Now, what does that mean? Well, the answer lies at the beginning of verse 15.

Isaiah says that God's servant will sprinkle many nations. This is ceremonial, sacrificial language. It's used to describe the way that priests are anointed with oil, or sacrificial animals are slaughtered, and the blood is sprinkled on the altar, like in Leviticus 4.

So, God's servant, exalted in his battered, bruised, bloody state, will sprinkle all the nations, both Jew and Gentile.

He will cleanse them of their sin like a sacrifice does. But how? How exactly does God's servant accomplish this cleansing?

Look at verses 3 and 4. 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.

[10:27] Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. This is an astonishing passage when you think about it.

Isaiah says that God's servant is going to minister among his people and take away their pain. He's going to be a physician among patients.

But despite this kindness, people would look at God's servant and think that he was despised by God, that God hated him. As one afflicted by God.

Another way of translating afflicted here is to say that God disciplined him. People would think he was under God's discipline despite his ministry to God's people.

To an extent, God's servant is under God's discipline. However, he's not being disciplined because of his own actions. He's being disciplined for the actions of another.

[11:31] Look at verse 5. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him.

And by his wounds, we are healed. 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.

God's servant is being punished for the wrongdoing of the patients. God is disciplining the servant because of what other people has done.

So this, according to Isaiah, is how God's servant will sprinkle the nations. How he will cleanse them. He will cleanse the nations as a sacrifice with his own blood.

He will be a guilt offering for the sins of others. Now, why is this necessary? Why should God's servant be crushed and pierced for other people's guilt, what he hasn't even done?

[12:37] Well, verse 6 begins to answer this question. It says that we all, like sheep, have gone astray. That we all have turned to our own way.

We are all like sheep. I'm like a sheep who has gone off north to pursue poisonous blackberries. And Laura has galloped off south to find poisonous dandelions.

Every single person pursues their own desires apart from God, like sheep that a shepherd is trying to control. And we've all gone astray.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Stephen preached on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. And he spoke about how two goats would be chosen. The first goat would be slaughtered as a sin offering.

And the second goat, the priest would take and confess Israel's sin on the goat. And then send it off to bear the guilt of that sin away from Israel.

[13:40] This is the picture that Isaiah paints in chapter 53. In verse 6, he writes, The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And again, in verse 10, Isaiah writes, The Lord makes his life an offering for sin.

Finally, Isaiah writes of the servant in verses 11 through 12, That he is a righteous servant. And he will bear the iniquities of the people. Now, as we learn from the Old Testament, Sacrifices have to be pure and unblemished.

That's what God required. Pure sacrifices. Unblemished sacrifices. This passage describes God's servant as pure and unblemished.

He acts wisely in chapter 52, verse 10. And then in chapter 53, verse 9, God's servant had done no violence, Nor was any deceit found in his mouth.

And then verse 10 describes the will of God's servant as being completely aligned with God. The will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. And then in verse 11, Isaiah explicitly calls God's servant righteous.

[14:55] He is the righteous one. God's servant is pure, unblemished, because he is righteous. A righteous sacrifice for unrighteous people.

And note that God's servant is accomplishing God's will by dying. It was the Lord's will to crush him. And it was the servant who accomplished God's will.

So how does Isaiah describe God's servant? As a sacrifice. Isaiah describes God's servant as your sacrifice. Now here in South Africa, if you go out to eat at a restaurant, when you're done, the server will bring the pay points directly to your table, and you can pay with your card or with cash.

In the United States, it's different. The server actually takes your card away to the back, to the fixed pay point in the back, and pays for your bill there.

So you can't pay with Snapscan or anything like that. When you forget your wallet, you're in trouble. When I was last in the United States, I was with my brother-in-law, and we went out to eat.

[16:09] And I'd forgotten my wallet. But I'd already ordered, and it was too late for me to do anything. I was in debt. But my brother-in-law said, oh, don't worry about it. I got you covered.

He paid for me. He paid for my debt. In Isaiah 52 and 53, the prophet says that everyone is in debt to God.

Everyone is sinful. Everyone is a rebel who has turned away from God's will. But the righteous servant died as a sin offering for the guilt of the rebels.

700 years after this prophecy was written, God's servant and the servant Jesus Christ came into the world, and he did nothing wrong. In fact, Isaiah chapter 52 and 53 converted one of the first ever recorded African Christians.

In Acts chapter 8, an official from the Ethiopian royal court was reading Isaiah chapter 52 and 53, and he didn't know what to make of it. And then Philip, one of Jesus' followers, came and explained that Jesus did all these things.

[17:24] Jesus was the righteous one. Jesus followed God's will. Jesus died as a sin offering for the guilt of God's people. And the Ethiopian official believed Philip's message, and he was asked to be baptized, to be sprinkled by the sacramental water as commanded by Christ.

Church, you must trust God's servant, Jesus Christ. You must trust him as a sacrifice for your sin. As a sacrifice for your sin. Now, often there's a misconception about Jesus' death. We think of him as a sacrifice for sin in general, and we don't think about our particular sins as that which put him up there.

He died for the sins of the world, but not necessarily my sin. But Christ bore the guilt for your individual sins on the cross.

Yesterday, when you lied about something you did, God put the guilt for that iniquity on Christ. Last week, when you got angry at your kids or your spouse and you yelled at them, that transgression pierced Christ on the cross.

[18:45] Last month, when you found yourselves, when you found yourselves lusting after a co-worker or a classmate, Christ was crushed for the guilt of that particular iniquity.

Jesus offered his life to God as a sacrifice for your sins, and God poured out his wrath against your sins upon Jesus.

And you cannot do anything to take away your sins. There's nothing you can do. One sin is enough to infect you at a deepest level, because God calls you to perfection all the time.

No matter how many good deeds you do, no matter how much you give to God, no matter how much you pray, no matter how involved in church you are, you are not enough.

That's why you must trust God's servant, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for your sin. So trust God's servant by confessing your sins to God.

[19:51] Confess your sins to God, and tell him your specific sins, because it is those specific sins that put Jesus on the cross. It's really tempting to, when you come to confession, to confess to God in general terms.

God, I'm a bad person. I've sinned. Please forgive me. Now, God does forgive the sins that you're not even aware of, because he's kind and gracious. But confess your specific sins.

For example, God, yesterday when I gave money to someone who asked me, I did not do it out of love for that person. I did it to feel better about me, and I did it so that those around me would think I was generous.

Forgive me of yesterday's false motivation, because Jesus Christ bore the guilt of my hypocritical heart. That's specificity. So trust God's servant, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice for your specific sin, by confessing your sins specifically.

Also, trust God's servant as a sacrifice, by acknowledging that he's enough. He's done it all. All of God's wrath against sin was poured out on him.

[21:11] There is no guilt left. You can't do it. Jesus justifies you. Often we feel the need to bring our own good works to God, and say, Jesus died for me, but also look at this.

Check this out. Check how good I was yesterday. Reject that. Reject that temptation with the Spirit's help, because it is only by Christ alone.

As Paul wrote in Galatians 2.21, if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing. We've been asking the question, how does Isaiah describe God's servant?

And we've seen that God's servant is a sacrifice. But what makes his sacrifice effective? How is the servant an effective sacrifice?

Let's keep looking at the passage and ask, how does Isaiah describe the servant? And the second point is shorter than the first. Look again with me at chapter 52, verse 13.

[22 : 24] Isaiah writes, See, my servant will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Now, earlier I mentioned how the Bible typically uses the phrase highly exalted to describe God.

But here it is used to describe God's servant, who will be lifted up and exalted as a beaten and battered person.

So, with that thought, let's read chapter 53, verses 1 through 3. Isaiah writes, 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. So, Isaiah describes the remarkable nature of the servant here.

He's like, who could possibly believe this message? It's unbelievable. Because God's servant will have a humble beginning. He will grow up like a plant out of dry ground.

[23 : 52] God's servant will not be a beautiful Hollywood star. He will grow up like a normal person. And because of that, people will turn away from him.

And then in verses 7 through 8, Isaiah writes that God's servant, who grows up out of dry and dusty ground, would experience the oppression of an unjust political system.

And yet, God would raise up this murdered servant. Look at verses 11 through 12. Isaiah writes, 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. 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. Isaiah is saying here that the servant will receive life again.

[25 : 00] God will give the servant back his life. The servant will be resurrected from the dead and see life again. And then, Isaiah describes him as a great king.

He's a victorious king, coming back from war, carrying the spoils of war, which he will divide.

Moreover, the servant king is a priest king, who intercedes for God's people, for those whom he died.

Now, this picture of God's servants growing up as a normal person, dying, dying, and then being given life again, to be a victorious king, it echoes Isaiah 9, 6-7, much earlier in the book.

And here, the prophet spoke of the Messiah in these words, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end.

[26 : 12] He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on forevermore. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Did you catch that? Between Isaiah 9 and Isaiah 53 and 54, we see that God's servant, Jesus Christ, is fully man and fully God.

The child who grows up like a tender plant is Israel's Almighty God. The child who grows up to be a man and lays down his life for his people will rise from the dead because he is the creator of all things, and death cannot hold him.

The servant, Jesus, is the eternal Son of God who is the priest-king over everything. That is what makes the sacrifice effective.

Sin is the failure to live perfectly for all time and therefore deserves eternal punishment. Jesus Christ, as fully man, as fully God, can endure that eternal punishment.

[27 : 30] And thus, death could not hold him. Jesus Christ lives now and reigns forever. However, my mom was visiting from the United States, and so we took her to the beach.

And my son, Alistair's two years old, he loves the beach. And one of the things that he was doing while we were there is he would take a bucket, walk down to the shoreline, fill it up with water, walk way up to the top of the beach, and dump all the water out to try to get all the sand wet.

Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, over and over and over. No matter how much water he scooped up and poured out onto the sand, he could neither empty the ocean nor bring the ocean all the way up on the sand.

His efforts were too small. He was finite. In Isaiah 52 and 53, we see that God's servant, Jesus Christ, is sovereign.

He is king over death because he is the creator. He is fully God and fully man. He endured all the punishment for your sins, and there is no more punishment left.

[28 : 54] You are not under sin's power. You are under Christ's power. So how does Isaiah describe God's servant? As a sacrifice and as a sovereign.

God's servant is a sovereign. And because he's your sovereign, you can trust him. You can trust him with your life.

Jesus was betrayed by his own people and rigged by the oppressive colonial judicial system of the Romans so that he could bear the guilt for your sin.

When someone takes a bullet for you, you tend to trust them. So when Jesus says, do not be anxious about anything, trust him.

When Jesus says to bless your enemy, you can trust him. When he says it is finished, you can trust him.

[29 : 54] He is the sovereign who died for you. You must trust Jesus with your life even when you fail. Some people think that when you become a Christian, life completely changes, you stop sinning instantly.

Now you've got to be a good person and show God what's up. But Jesus died for the sins you committed after becoming a Christian. He bore that guilt as well.

As your sovereign, he is changing you and transforming you because your sin will truly be no more. He loves you and he will never leave you nor forsake you. So how does Isaiah describe God's servant? He describes God's servant as a sacrifice and a sovereign.

And as a sacrifice and a sovereign, he takes sinful, iniquitous rebels and transforms them into servants, righteous servants.

[31 : 03] Jesus Christ saves you, church, so trust him. Will you pray with me? Almighty God, thank you for sending Christ to us.

Thank you that he bears the guilt for our sin so that we can be accepted by you. Thank you for your patience and your love.

Thank you for the picture that we have of your servant, Jesus Christ, here in Isaiah 52 and 53. We cannot imagine what he went through. We ask that we would be motivated out of love for him to live after you according to the work of your Holy Spirit.

We love you, Lord. It's in your son's name that we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.