

# The Suffering of the Servant

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 21 March 2021

Preacher: James Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] So let's now read together from Isaiah 53. Let's hear God's word. 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, 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.

[ 1 : 09 ] 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.

And 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.

[ 2 : 20 ] For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. So we will think about the first six verses today, this famous servant song in Isaiah 53, and we'll think particularly about the suffering of the servant from those first six verses.

You are perhaps familiar with the phrase that one man's freedom fighter is another's terrorist, the point being that one's perspective and point of view influences how we view particular characters and their actions.

We can think of Nelson Mandela, we can think of Martin Luther King, and many others. We recognise too, don't we, I think, that our perspectives on a person or on a situation can become fixed, especially if it's connected to our view of the world and how the world works.

And we see that in a very polarised world that we live in today. People find themselves in camps, and it's really hard to even understand how the other thinks. Well, we're going to spend three weeks in this remarkable chapter with a remarkable perspective.

What we have is Isaiah, led by the Spirit, 700 years before the death of Jesus, and it's as if he, led by the Spirit, is overhearing eyewitnesses to the events around the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

[ 3 : 47 ] And he hears them confess. We thought one way, but we got it wrong. We were wrong about Jesus. So as he is being revealed, this prophecy, Isaiah transports his first hearers forward 700 years, and he then transports us back some 2,000 years, back to the suffering and the death of Jesus so that we might be able to answer, what is my perspective?

What is my verdict on Jesus and what he came to do? You've perhaps heard people talk about being on the wrong side of history, particularly in the world of politics.

You know that there is an important issue, and the logic goes that if you find yourself on the wrong side of that issue or that policy, you will, and your party will lose out in the end. Well, in a sense, we hear that principle being applied by the apostles in the Book of Acts.

The crucial event is the sending of Jesus and his work on the cross and his resurrection. And the apostles will say, if your verdict on Jesus does not match up with God's, then you are on the wrong side and you will lose out, and you will lose out eternally.

So in Acts chapter 2 and at verse 36, Peter says, God has made this Jesus whom you crucified. There's the world's verdict. God has made him both Lord and Messiah. There's God's verdict.

[ 5 : 08 ] Acts chapter 3 that we read, you killed the author of life. There's the world's verdict. But God raised him from the dead, and he glorified him. And we are witnesses of this. There's God's verdict.

So this unique voice, this unique perspective from Isaiah 53 brings us a really vivid description of Jesus' suffering and death and resurrection. We'll see that in those three weeks running up to Easter, and we're called then to share the Lord's verdict on Jesus and to help us to do that, we're going to focus today on what Isaiah says about Jesus suffering in his life and Jesus suffering in his death.

So first of all, in the first three verses, two perspectives on the suffering of Jesus in his life. So here's Isaiah's prophecy in which he is revealing to us what contemporaries of Jesus might have said after the cross, after they have witnessed those events.

And in view here are those who have now come to faith in the Lord Jesus. In verse 1, these people say, who has believed our message?

They have come to believe the message of Jesus and now they're sharing that message, but they are finding themselves resisted, being resisted rather. So as they share their testimony, what is their approach?

[ 6 : 41 ] Their approach is very much there's a before and there's an after. We used to think this way about Jesus, but now with God's revelation, we think differently. So their perspective on Jesus suffering life before faith, let's look at verse 2.

They regarded Jesus as nothing special. He grew up before him like a tender shoot. Jesus was fragile. Jesus was weak. Think about perhaps the spring flowers in your garden, knowing that all it would take would be a harsh frost and those flowers would not make it.

He grew up like a root out of dry ground. What does that saying imply? It implies that Jesus was unimpressive. He began from unpromising conditions.

Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Isn't he Mary's son? Isn't he the son of the carpenter? What about the appearance of Jesus?

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. There was nothing compelling, nothing imposing. Jesus did not draw attention by his physical presence or by his nobility.

[ 7 : 58 ] Rather, we know Jesus was born in a stable and his home town was a backwater village that was regarded with contempt. He was homeless. When he rode into Jerusalem, he didn't come on a war horse.

He came on a donkey. When image is everything, many look at Jesus and say, he's nothing special. Verse 3 takes it further to imply that in their thinking before faith, Jesus was a nobody. He was despised and rejected by mankind. The natural reaction of people to Jesus was to treat him with contempt. We see that all through his life with the religious leaders.

We hear the mockery at the cross. He saved others, but he can't save himself. Jesus was a man of suffering, a man of sorrow and familiar with pain. Isolated, misunderstood, not receiving sympathy. And bear in mind that he's familiar with sorrow and pain only because he came to take ours, because he came to save us. He left the glory of heaven with it was no sorrow or pain to enter into our world to save us.

[ 9 : 15 ] Verse 3 says, he was held in low esteem, drawn from the world of accountancy. Jesus is a zero. People turned their faces and turned their backs to Jesus.

He was devalued and degraded both in his life and as he died. And Isaiah allows us to overhear this testimony. This was how we saw Jesus, but now, with the perspective of faith, it's quite different.

Back to verse 1. Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Who is Jesus? He is the arm of the Lord. What does that mean? Jesus is God's

demonstration of saving power.

It's used a lot in the book of Exodus. God saving by an outstretched arm, the arm of power to rescue from slavery.

The point now we see Jesus is God's powerful saviour. He brings freedom, not from physical slavery, but from spiritual slavery, from sin leading to death. And he sets people free so that we might enjoy life with God.

[10:25] And they're now able to see that. So how did this change happen? Because this is a total 180, isn't it? Verse 1, again, is so important. To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? It was revealed to them by God, by his Spirit, giving them the eyes of faith.

Without that, they would have continued to treat Jesus with contempt. And without the eyes of faith, so too would we. Now, they understand Jesus suffers to save us.

And so the message that Isaiah 53 brings is don't ignore Jesus. Don't despise Jesus. As Isaiah draws us in, let's ask the question, what is my verdict on Jesus, the suffering servant?

Does it match the crowds of culture and society? Does it match the Lord's verdict? If you're a worshipper of Jesus today, praise God that he has revealed that truth to you, that he has given you the eyes of faith.

It was nothing to do with us. It's all a gift of God's grace. So let's praise him for that. And if you have up until now, as it were, walked on by, ask God to reveal the truth to your heart.

[11:45] Why did Jesus come? Jesus came because by nature we are all on the wrong side of history. We are separated from God because of our sin and our guilt, our deliberate rejection of God.

We stand under the judgment of God and we face, left to ourselves, eternal separation without God and without anything that is good. Jesus came because we are a people who need to be rescued and God in love sent Jesus, our loving rescuer.

Who is Jesus? Jesus is the Lord's gift to us. Jesus is the substitute who suffers and dies in love for us. And he's come to promise true, eternal life, lasting and solid hope, deep, unending joy, freedom from guilt and fear, the answer to our loneliness in his person and in his work.

Are we trusting him? Have we seen who he is? And let me ask a further question if we're Christians today.

Who are we sharing this message with? So remember, this is testimony of people whose lives have been changed so now they're followers of Jesus and they want to bring the good news. Remember the power of our stories.

[13:14] I read a recent survey that said 57% of people who come to faith come because a friend or a family member taught them from God's word and showed them Jesus in their life and in their actions.

So are we praying and praying for one another to have opportunities and when those opportunities come that we would take them and that our life and our character and our words would point people towards Jesus.

Well, from two perspectives on Jesus' suffering life, let's think now about two perspectives on Jesus' suffering in his death. So Isaiah is continuing to invite us in to listen in to the testimony of these spectators who were at the cross and it's very vivid his description.

The events, did you notice, the events are described in the past tense as if they have already taken place. Isaiah invites his readers to span time and space to take us right to the foot of the cross.

So as we watch the suffering and the death of Jesus, what's clearly understood by the people in view here is that God was involved in the death of Jesus.

[14:38] But before faith, they thought God was punishing Jesus for his sin. But once the Spirit worked and opened their eyes and gave them faith, they saw Jesus as punished for our sin.

So let's consider both those perspectives. Let's see how they viewed the cross before faith when they thought Jesus was punished for his sin. Look at the second part of verse 4.

It's very strong language. We considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. This is the language of deep suffering.

They clearly, as they watched the cross, recognised God's hand of punishment upon Jesus but they misunderstood why it was happening. We know that the charge that was brought by the religious leaders was that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, claiming to be Son of God when he wasn't.

And then when we go to the cross, we hear mockery, let God rescue him if he delights in him. So many in the crowd looked at Jesus and thought, here is someone who is dying under God's curse and he deserves it because he's claimed something that is just not true.

[ 15 : 56 ] He's made himself equal to God. But then, as the Spirit worked and as the truth was revealed, what's their view of the cross after faith?

Not that Jesus was punished for his own sin, no, that Jesus was punished for our sin. The Spirit works in them and they recognise Jesus is our substitute.

He takes our sin, he takes our place, he takes our punishment. Isaiah's first hearers were familiar with the Day of Atonement and what happened on the Day of Atonement is that there were two animals, two goats and one goat it was taken and the sin of the people as it were was transferred onto that animal and then it was slaughtered as a way to say it's a blood sacrifice that is required for forgiveness and peace with God.

But then there was the other animal, the scapegoat and again the sins of the people were symbolically laid on that animal and the animal was then sent out into the world and it's carrying as it were those sins, carrying them out of sight.

And now the testimony from Isaiah 53 is Jesus is what that ceremony is, what the Day of Atonement points to. His life is that perfect sacrifice, his blood brings forgiveness, he is the one who carries sin and disposes of it in his life.

[ 17 : 29 ] And we see in verses four to six, I think three important aspects of the gospel. First we see the cost, the cost of our salvation.

Look again at verse four. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we consider him punished by God.

There's an emphasis in this chapter on the great distinction. There's he, the servant, Jesus and we, those who benefit. But the point is that Jesus stands and acts alone in his suffering.

Jesus took up our pain and bore our suffering. Perhaps it would be helpful to think of the image of waist disposal.

What if you get someone who comes to do a bulky uplift? What do they do? They come and they pick up our waist, our rubbish. They perhaps put it on their shoulders depending how heavy it is and they then dispose of it.

[ 18 : 30 ] So it is no longer our problem. Isaiah 53 reminds us that Jesus picks up our sin, our moral and spiritual garbage and he shoulders it and he carries it as if it was his own and he disposes of it.

He takes the full punishment for it so it is fully forgiven for those who have the eyes of faith and who trust in Jesus and that what he did on the cross he did for us.

This is costly grace. This is the cost to God of our salvation. Jesus, the Son of God, dies for our sin in our place to secure for us a forgiveness we can freely receive by faith, by trusting and believing. So that's the cost that we see in the gospel. But then in verse 5 we are shown the exchange that takes place, the great exchange that takes place in the gospel.

Jesus takes something from us and he gives something to us. What does Jesus take? Verse 5 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.

[ 20 : 00 ] Jesus takes our sin One of the words is transgression that's a deliberate breaking a deliberate rejection of God's law. when we turn our back on what we clearly know God wants us to do when we break and dismiss the Ten Commandments for example and Jesus takes our iniquity when God sets a straight path and we make it crooked because we don't live to fully please God Jesus takes that on himself so he takes our sin and then he takes the penalty for sin he is pierced and he is crushed and he bears wounds all pictures of violent death and as we are reminded he is punished by God and that is a deeper agony than the physical pain he endured Jesus as he becomes the sin bearer of the world is regarded by his father as the worst sinner who ever lived and Jesus feels that sense of being forsaken by his father on the cross as he faces in himself the holy anger of God against sin and remember

Jesus is sinlessly perfect he is doing that not for his sin but for our sin so Jesus takes sin and it's penalty and what does he give Jesus gives we're told peace and healing the wonderful message of the gospel is that Jesus is abandoned so that we can be welcomed so that we can be reconciled Jesus takes into himself the poison of sin so that we can be healed and here is the unique beauty of Christianity because it shows us God's grace and kindness on full display the Bible doesn't say to

us do better try harder try and earn your salvation what we see in this exchange is that it's all about God's kindness we could never pay the price for our sin we could never earn God's favour because we can never be good enough rather by faith we receive it as a gift purchased for us at the cross by the suffering of the Lord Jesus and then there's another aspect of the gospel that we see in verse 6 and that's the rescue that takes place notice that the verse starts and finishes with an all we all this is a vital part of the testimony that's shared in Isaiah 53 we all have gone astray there's the extent of the human problem no one is exempt from the problem of sin all of us in our conscience in our hearts know that all is not well between us and God left to ourselves there's a second all at the end there the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all there's the extent of God's solution and God's salvation there is no one who can say this is not open to me this is not for me anyone who has faith and who looks to Jesus will know that he has taken sin that he has carried out that rescue the picture here in verse 6 is of a wandering sheep and a wandering sheep far from the shepherd is in danger and notice here it's in danger by their own choosing they turn to their own way we turn away from our good and gracious king abandoning the shepherd and his care for us and God's response the penalty for wandering the penalty of rebellion is not laid on God's people it's laid on Jesus Jesus as he said in John 10 I am the good shepherd and I lay down my life for the sheep Jesus suffers death so that you and I might enjoy true life if we look to him and trust him and trust his care and trust what he did on the cross again Jesus is being presented to us as the suffering servant the suffering saviour and Isaiah invites the question what is my verdict on the cross on Jesus suffering on the cross remember Jesus death and resurrection our true history every scholar of note every historian of note whether they're Christian or not recognises the cross is fact and many even sceptical even non-Christian scholars recognise the resurrection has facts backing it up this is truth don't rush by the truth don't ignore the truth don't think that it's a small thing or for another day this is too important remember the Lord's verdict

God glorified Jesus God raised Jesus and in that there is a reminder that the price for our sin and guilt is fully paid that sin and death have been defeated that Jesus has been vindicated and raised in triumph so just like the characters of Isaiah 53 who have been pictured in this prophecy if as yet you have not trusted in Jesus as Lord and Saviour recognise that you need the work of God's spirit in your life to change your heart and change your perspective ask him to do that read God's word read the gospels discover who Jesus is and why he came so that you would trust in him so as we approach Easter is it not too far away now let's worship Jesus with the eyes of faith remembering that there's no part of our need that he doesn't deal with that's good news and if we're trusting him take heart that we are on the right side of history that Jesus the saviour is for us and he is with us and he has won the victory for us