

The Servant Saves Through Suffering

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[0:00] Well, good morning, Christ the King. It really is a joy to be with you. I'm making eye contact with very familiar faces to me.

Mike Salvati has been a really significant friend and mentor in my life way back to when I was a seminary student serving in student ministry at Crossway, and he was the youth pastor, and I remember when God started to stir his heart about leading a church plant, and I cannot believe that the bulletin says the 10th anniversary is coming up.

I just rejoice at God's goodness to this church. So it's fun to be here, to kind of release him to go on sabbatical.

It's fun to see you guys again, but the great privilege of this morning is getting to worship God together and open scripture together. So would you please turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 52 and verse 13.

We'll start reading there. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be Bibles in the pew in front of you, and Isaiah 52 and verse 13 is on page 729.

[1:16] So I'll give you a moment to get there, and then I will read that, and we'll pray. Isaiah chapter 52, verse 13.

Please follow along with me as I read. Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted.

As many were astonished at you, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. So shall he sprinkle many nations.

Kings shall shut their mouths because of him. For that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. Who has believed what he has heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

[2:25] He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.

Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away.

[3:26] And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days.

The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong. Because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. Let's pray together. Our Father, we say again what we're just saying, which is show us Christ.

[4:38] Your Son is the bread of life, the food that our souls need. He gives living water. Those who believe in him, never hunger, never thirst, are satisfied forever.

So, what we need above all this morning is for you to give us Christ. To show him to us again, so that we might believe and live. And so, God, thank you for your love for your people, and your commitment to your word.

And we pray that you would come and speak. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, we're kind of hopping in midstream in Isaiah.

But if you were to read this book from the beginning, you would encounter again and again this mysterious figure whom Isaiah calls the servant.

He's the subject of four poems in Isaiah's book. And we have, Christians have traditionally called them the servant songs.

[5:44] And in the servant song in chapter 49, Isaiah tells us that the servant, this servant who's coming, will be called from his mother's womb, set apart from birth for a very specific task.

God was going to use him to gather his people back to himself. God's people had repeatedly turned away from him. That's the backdrop of Isaiah.

Though he had been steadfast in his love for them, they had over and over gone astray. Gone after other gods, after idols. And so, they had eventually been conquered by Babylon, taken into exile. Israel had to leave the promised land. But God was promising, even before it happened in the book of Isaiah, that God would gather them back to himself.

That he would bring them home. And he would bring them back to himself through the servant. And not just that. He says in chapter 49, just bringing Israel to himself isn't enough.

[6:47] It's too small a task. Isaiah said that the servant would be a light for the nations. That God's salvation would reach to the ends of the earth. Those who had never even heard of the God of Israel would receive his love and come to know him as Savior.

And the immediate question that raises is how. How will the servant do that? How will he gather God's people back to him and reveal salvation to the whole earth?

Through military conquest? You could imagine the servant as a great warrior. Raising an army. Just marching across the earth. Saving God's people. And bringing good news to all of them.

That would bring the people back to the land. But the people's greatest problem isn't geographic. It's not their physical exile from the land. It's their spiritual exile from God.

If the servant is going to gather them back to God, he's going to have to do something about their hearts that always go astray. His work is going to need to go deeper.

[7:53] They don't just need to be brought home. They need to be healed of their wayward hearts. And so do the nations. And so do we. Isaiah tells us that the servant doesn't save through power.

Not that kind of power anyway. How does he save? Well this passage starts off with a striking paradox. Look back at chapter 52 verse 13.

He says, Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. God said, my servant is going to succeed. He's going to triumph.

He's going to be exalted. And we see the effect of his triumph in verse 15. So shall he sprinkle many nations. In the Bible, sprinkling is a way of making something holy.

Of purifying it. Of cleansing it. Of setting it apart for God. Sometimes it's water that's used to sprinkle. Sometimes oil. Sometimes it's the blood of a sacrifice. But sprinkling sets something apart to belong to God.

[8:53] And Isaiah says, what the servant does is going to sprinkle the nations. He's going to set the nations. The nations will belong to God. And what he does will be so amazing.

It's going to render world leaders speechless. He says, kings shall shut their mouths because of him. So what is this great success? What is this triumph? What has he done? Look at verse 14. As many were astonished at you, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. What has he done? What has he done to triumph? He's been beaten to the point that he is no longer recognizable. Not just as himself, but as a human. You see the paradox. The servant succeeds through failing. He succeeds, he triumphs through being defeated. He saves through suffering.

[9:57] That's what this passage is about. It's simultaneously one of the most sobering and one of the most magnificent passages in the whole Bible. It's quoted at least seven times in the New Testament.

On the night before Jesus died, he said, Isaiah 53 explains what I'm about to do. He says, this is what's going to happen. And he was numbered with the transgressors. Isaiah 53 verse 12. If you understand what this passage is saying about Jesus, you will understand the heart of Christianity. And if you believe what this passage teaches about Jesus, you will have a personal assurance of the love of God and a fountain of joy that nothing in this world can touch. Isaiah highlights three facets of Jesus' suffering. He tells us that his suffering is submissive, it's substitutionary, and it's saving.

Jesus' suffering. Jesus' suffering. Jesus' suffering. He suffers as a substitute, and he suffers to save. So first, he suffered submissively. Jesus' suffering was neither incidental nor accidental.

[11:06] It was central and willful and purposeful. It was the mission on which he had been sent, to which he submitted entirely. It's why he came to earth.

Why he concealed his divine glory in human flesh. Look at chapter 53 verse 1. Who has believed what he has heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

The arm of the Lord is God's saving power. You can look back at chapter 52 verse 10. Isaiah says, The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

God rolls up his sleeves, as it were. He exposes his arm. He goes to work, and he saves his people. But the arm of the Lord isn't just God's power disconnected from himself.

An arm isn't just an instrument you use. Your arm is part of yourself. Where the arm of the Lord is, the Lord is. The arm of the Lord is God present in power to save.

[12:16] And Isaiah tells us that God's arm, God's presence and saving power, is a person. The servant. And he asks, To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

Who has recognized him? And the implied answer is no one. Almost no one recognized that Jesus of Nazareth was God himself come near to save. Who would imagine that God would be born as an infant and have to grow up?

Look at verse 2. For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground.

Who would have expected that God would come not as a royal prince, handsome, clothed with majesty, but as a carpenter's son from a backwater town.

He was nothing special to look at. Look at verse 2 again. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. If you passed him on the street in Nazareth, there is nothing about him that would make you do a double take.

He was nondescript. And yet he was the image of the invisible God. He perfectly reflected God's moral purity, his love, his truthfulness.

[13:33] And people hated him for it. Look at verse 3. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Now, note that he doesn't say, they esteemed him not. He says, we esteemed him not. All of us who now follow him can say, there was a time when we esteemed him not.

John tells us in his gospel, he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. When they heard about his miracles, they said, isn't this the carpenter's son? How could he be anything special?

Even his siblings didn't see who he was. He was God's saving power in human flesh, and he seemed to almost everyone like no big deal. Maybe he seems like no big deal to you. You know that he taught about religion and morals, but that may be of no interest to you. You know that he allegedly did some miracles, but there are lots of reports like that from the ancient world. [14:42] What makes Jesus different from any other ancient religious teacher? Well, Jesus did something that no one else did. He came to die. He didn't just encounter rejection, he came to be rejected.

He didn't just experience suffering, he came to suffer and die. Look at verse seven. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. When Jesus was taken off to death, he didn't protest. He didn't try to get out of it. It's why he came. You can read the gospel accounts of Jesus' trial before the Jewish council and before the governor, Pilate. They are amazed. He doesn't respond to any of the accusations against him. He doesn't open his mouth, fulfilling this. And that's not the only way Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus' death.

[15:42] If you are unsure what to make of Jesus, one of the things that you are going to have to decide is what to do with the fact that Isaiah predicted details of Jesus' death 700 years before his birth.

Look at verse 8. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. An unjust trial? Check. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living? Condemned to death? Check. Verse 9. And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, laid Jesus' body in his own tomb. Check. God foretold the plan seven centuries B.C. and Jesus submitted to it completely. He came to die. Now you might say, other people have given their lives for a loved one or for a cause. Jesus is not the only person who chose to die. Now, listen. Many people have chosen when to die or how to die, but they didn't choose to die.

[17:00] They were going to die sometime. Only Jesus chose to die because only Jesus didn't deserve death. Death came into the world as the wages, the payment for human sin, and Jesus alone has never sinned.

Look at the end of verse 9. Although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth, Jesus died innocently. He had not just done nothing deserving execution. He'd done nothing deserving death. Jesus came to die. He volunteered. He did not seek to get out of it, but submitted to it.

Why? Well, the second facet of his suffering is that he suffered as a substitute. Look at verse 4. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but the sorrows and the grief were ours. Now, even that is remarkable. We will have several opportunities this morning to marvel at the love of God, but let's not miss this one.

[18:07] Jesus came from the presence of his Father where there is no grief, and there is no sorrow, and he freely entered into ours. He experienced the whole range of trouble that comes with human life here on earth.

Suffering Christian, your Savior understands what it is to suffer. He knows grief and sorrow. You have a sympathetic high priest. But this is describing much more than sympathy. When Isaiah says in verse 4, he has borne our sorrows, he doesn't just mean he has felt them.

The word borne means he has lifted them off of us. So you imagine a father and son on a backpacking trip, and over the course of the day, the son's pack has felt heavier and heavier, and finally he can't go on.

So his father reaches down and takes the pack and puts it on himself. He takes, Jesus has taken on himself our griefs and our sorrows.

[19:18] And Jesus was so marked by grief and sorrow that he seemed to those around him not a man blessed by God, but a man cursed. Verse 4 again, we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

And of course, on the cross, that's exactly what he was. So this passage, this song, from 52.13 to 53.12, it has five stanzas with three verses in each stanza.

So if you find the center stanza, and you find the center verse of the center stanza, you will find the very heart of this song. And the very heart of this song is verse 5.

And it's not just the center of the song, but of Christianity and of human history and of all reality. Look at verse 5. There are two parties here.

There's he and we. There's the one and the many. So whose transgression is in view? It's ours.

[20:36] Right? Transgression describes our rebellion against God, our breaking of his law. Whose iniquity is in view? It's ours. Iniquity is our inner bentness, that thing in us that always makes us go astray.

The transgression is ours. The iniquity is ours. But who gets pierced? He does. Who gets crushed? He does.

He gets chastised. He gets disciplined. He gets wounded. But who gets the peace? We do. Who gets healed? We do.

He suffered as a substitute. The one in place of the many. The heart of Christianity is nothing but this. Christ died for our sins.

He suffered as a substitute. Because we're the ones who go astray, aren't we? Verse 6. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone, everyone to his own way.

[21:47] Isn't that right? Don't we choose our own way? God has purposes for everything he's given us. Our time, our money, our words, our kids, our sexuality.

But we choose our way. We might go his way when it's the way we want to go anyway or when it doesn't cost us very much or when we might get seen doing it and admired.

But when it's hard, when we're tested, apart from his help, we so quickly go astray. even if only in our hearts and our imaginations.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Isaiah says, we wander off like sheep. And what happens to sheep when they stray off from the shepherd who feeds them and protects them and heals them when they're injured?

Sheep that go astray die. And yet here, it's the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep. Look at the end of verse 6. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[22:55] If you've read the Old Testament, you might remember the annual Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16, the day when God would graciously forgive and cleanse his people of all their sins.

And on the Day of Atonement, the high priest takes two goats. And one goat he kills and takes the blood and sprinkles it on the mercy seat over the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place and the other goat he takes and he confesses over it the sins of the people.

He lays on the goat the iniquities of the nation and he sends it off into the wilderness and the goat bears their iniquities away, never to be seen again.

In the same way, we've all gone astray but the Lord has laid on Jesus our iniquity and he bears it all away. He suffered as a substitute. He was, as Isaiah says in verse 10, an offering for guilt.

Every person here is going to have to decide what you are going to do with your guilt. Not just your sense of feeling guilty but your awareness that you have done actual wrongs.

[24:06] And I can imagine three options. One, you can deny that there is even such a thing as guilt by denying that there are moral absolutes you have to obey. If there are no rules, there can be no guilt from breaking the rules.

But are there really no rules? We all recognize that some things are just wrong. Not wrong for some people in some places under some circumstances but wrong for all people at all times in all circumstances.

Murder, child abuse, racism. There are moral laws and they come from somewhere. Some moral lawgiver. You can't evade guilt just by evading moral reality.

Or second, you can acknowledge that moral laws exist and guilt is possible but deny that you're guilty because you've done basically everything right. But that delusion is only possible until you have a relationship with another human being and they will let you know right away that you're not perfect.

Which leaves the third option. You can have your guilt taken away. Someone outside you can take the guilt from you. A substitute.

[25:19] Someone who has no guilt of their own so they can suffer the punishment your guilt deserves. Behold the servant. This is why Jesus came to live a morally perfect life so he could die for our transgressions and our iniquities.

Do you see his love? Not just that he died. Although that is astounding. But how he died. He chose a violent death.

A criminal's death. A punitive death. He died in a way that showed how terrible sin is. How serious. How deserving we all are of being pierced and crushed and wounded.

His death showed the full evil of sin but also the full extent of his love for sinners. Paul says in Romans 5, 8 that God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. John says in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation the sacrifice for our sins. He means us to see his love.

[26:28] If you try to discern whether God loves you by looking at the circumstances of your life you will despair. Think if Jesus had done that or Joseph or David or Job or Peter.

Don't look there. Look at the cross. Where God suffered out of love for us where he substituted himself for us.

He suffered as a substitute. And what did he accomplish? The third facet of his suffering is that he suffered to save. In verse 9 the servant has been laid in the grave.

He is dead and gone. Which makes verse 10 extraordinary. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days.

[27:33] Did you see that? After he gives his life as a sacrifice he sees his offspring. He is reunited with those he died to save. He prolongs his days.

He lives. After suffering Jesus rose victorious over death and he shares the spoils of his victory with all who trust in him.

Look at verse 12. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many and he shall divide the spoil with the strong. So what spoils does he share?

What has he won that he freely gives? Well he shares his righteousness. Look at the middle of verse 11. By his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant make many to be accounted righteous.

So just as our sins were accounted to him so his perfect obedience is accounted to us. We are made right with God. He sees us as though we had always obeyed with the perfection of his son.

[28:36] Don't you want a clear conscience? We have all done things we look back on with shame. And God never minimizes sin but he forgives it.

And he covers it with the righteousness of his son. All who trust in Christ have his righteousness and because of that we have look back at verse 5. It says upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

Because of what he's done we have peace with God. We have assurance that there is no longer any anger in God's heart towards us. No hostility that keeps us at arm's length.

Nothing that can ever separate us from his love. He is for us. He is a father and a friend. We have peace with him. In verse 5 again by his wounds we are healed.

Not just forgiven but healed. Made whole. Made well. Throughout this book Isaiah has repeatedly looked ahead to a future for God's people in a perfected creation in which everything wrong has been made right.

[29:48] Has been healed. So you could think of chapter 11 in verse 6. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together and a little child shall lead them.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Or amen. Or chapter 25 verses 6 to 8. On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food a feast of well-aged wine of rich food full of marrow of aged wine well refined and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples the veil that is spread over all nations he will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.

We need healing of the bentness of our hearts of the infirmity of our bodies this world needs healing of its brokenness of tears of death and because of what Jesus has done on the cross that healing will come.

Paul says in Colossians 1 God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of the cross sin death tears tragedy all of it came into the world because of the sin of Adam and all of it will ultimately leave the world through the salvation of Christ.

[31:37] There will be true healing. Now I don't want to deny that a degree of real healing is possible now. For those who have trusted in Christ God really does heal patterns of sin he helps us to walk in new freedom at times he really does heal bodies in ways that medicine can't explain but the fullness of healing awaits Jesus' return and the new creation.

He will share it freely with all those who trust in him. When Isaiah says in verse 11 out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied he means that as Jesus suffered the horrors of the cross he looked ahead he looked beyond to the future I've just described a future with his people with us in a new creation in which all is right and all is healed and all is well he looked out of the anguish of his soul ahead to that future and he was satisfied.

He considered the cross worth it for that to bring us complete salvation. Jesus suffered to save. So how should we respond? What is this passage calling us to? Isaiah is calling us to behold and believe in Jesus Christ who saves his people by suffering for their sins.

God tells us what he wants us to do right in chapter 52 verse 13 where the passage begins he says behold. He wants us to look.

[33:11] he wants us to consider he wants us to meditate on what this passage tells us about Jesus. The arm of the Lord the Son of God has humbled himself to death for us and been exalted on high.

What he has done is amazing. It leaves even kings speechless. Understanding what Jesus has accomplished through his death and resurrection gives us assurance of God's love for us.

It gives us hope for the future. It gives us joy even in the sufferings of this life. Don't look away from it. Don't neglect it. Behold him.

Behold him in this book as you read it and hear it proclaimed. Behold him in the words that we sing as we gather on Sundays. Behold him in his work in and through his body the church.

Behold him. And as you behold him believe verse 1 who has believed what he has heard from us.

[34:17] If you have seen that Jesus is the arm of the Lord that he's God's saving power then believe in him. Trust him. Trust that he loved you and gave himself for you.

Trust that his righteousness is yours and that you have complete peace with God. Trust him and in trusting follow him forever.

Let's pray. Our Lord Jesus we are amazed at what you have done.

At the greatness of your love. At the greatness of your humility. At the greatness of your perseverance. That you chose the cross.

That you chose the thorns. That you chose the scourge. Out of love for us amazes us. And we worship you and we trust you and we pray that you would so shape our lives by your grace and by your salvation salvation that in us others would encounter you as well.

[35:35] I pray your blessing on this church. I pray your blessing on Mike and Jenny and Mary as they travel. God use Christ the King church for your glory in this city.

I pray in Jesus name. Amen.