

AM Isaiah 52:13-53:12 The Servant of the LORD - His Character and Method of Work

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- [0 : 00] chapter 52 and we're going to read from verse 13 and continue into the following chapter. Isaiah chapter 52 and from verse 13.
- 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. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
- [1 : 20] As one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteem them not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.
- Yet we esteem them stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. But him was the chastisement that brought us peace.
- And with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone 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. And as for his generation. Who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living.
- [2 : 21] Stricken for the transgression of my people. And he 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.
- [3 : 19] May God bless to us this reading. It's in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 8. And we're just going to read a few verses from verse 26.

Acts chapter 8 at verse 26. Acts chapter 9.

Who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship. And was returning. Seated in his chariot. And he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

And the spirit said to Philip. Go over and join this chariot. So Philip ran to him. And heard him reading Isaiah the prophet. And asked.

Do you understand what you're reading? And he said. How can I? Unless someone guides me. And he invited Philip to come up. And sit with him.

[4 : 44] Now the passage of the scripture that he read. That he was reading was this. Like a sheep. He was led to the slaughter. And like a lamb before its shearer.

Is silent. So he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation. Justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth. And the eunuch said to Philip. About whom I ask you. Does the prophet say this? About himself?

Or about someone else? Then Philip opened his mouth. And beginning with the scripture. He told him the good news about Jesus.

We'll just read to there. May God bless to us this. Read 52. And verses 13 and 14. Isaiah 52.

[5 : 42] Verses 13 and 14. 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. Now this passage is about the servant of the Lord. And if you know the book of Isaiah at all.

You know there are several passages. That speak about the servant of the Lord. And if you just look at these passages in Isaiah. You might well wonder who that servant is.

Because sometimes it seems that Israel is the servant of the Lord. Indeed in some passages. It quite plainly addresses Israel. As the servant of the Lord.

[6 : 44] And yet in other passages. That doesn't seem to fit. But of course if you look at the New Testament. We know immediately. That at least this passage.

Is about not Israel. But it's about our Lord. That's why we read the passage in Acts. Because there this passage in Isaiah 53. 52 and 53.

Is quoted. And it's the text that Philip takes up. To expound Jesus. To the Ethiopian eunuch.

So this passage is indeed about Jesus. And I don't think we've got much problem. With that idea at all. So we're looking at Jesus.

Who is the role that he performs as servant. And that's something of course. That is fitting at all times. To keep Jesus before us. It's important.

[7 : 40] To focus attention on who he is. Maybe an old, old story. But it will come to us with freshness. If we think about it constantly. And as we come to the Lord's table.

What more fitting. To have that little meditation. Upon who Jesus is. That's the one that is inviting us. To the table. That's the one that is host at the table.

That is the one that is presented to us. At the table. Through the bread and the wine. That's the one that is That's the one that is That is the one that is That is the one that is That is the servant.

That is the servant revealed in this passage. That we're looking at here. Now it's a pity that the chapter has been divided up In our Bibles the way it has.

Because the last few verses of chapter 52 Clearly form part of the theme of chapter 53. What we've got actually is a poem.

[8 : 41] A poem of five stanzas. Each of these taking up three verses in our translation. And the verses 13 to 15 of chapter 52 Are a sort of introduction to that poem.

And it takes up themes that are developed. It's a sort of summary of who the servant is. And of what he's going to do. And at that level it's good for us to think about this.

It brings to us themes that are developed in the passage. I could also use an illustration to indicate the importance of this passage.

It's like a reference that the Lord is giving in regard to his servant. I might imagine a situation where an old student A former student that is Asked me for a reference to him.

And I got to set out aspects of what I know about him. And I've put it to put it in a way that will commend him to others.

[9 : 49] And I might say he's humble. He's honest. He's hard working. And there you see I'm saying something about who he is. I'm saying something about his character. Or I might say he works well on his own.

He does his job. Any job he does he does thoroughly. He acts with responsibility in any task that's given to him. And there I'm saying something about his method of working.

Or I might say he gained his degree. Or he gained his prize in theology. Or something like that. And there I'm speaking about his achievements.

And giving a reference for the student. I'd refer to his character. His method of working. And his achievements. And I'd lay it out honestly. But I'd also lay it out in a way that would commend him to the attention of others.

And that I suggest is what is happening here. Here is God the Father. Here is the Lord. Giving a reference in regard to his servant.

[10 : 56] Laying out his character. He is wise. And he is exalted. Laying out how he does things.

That's in verse 14. It's not very plain. But we'll come to that in due course. And he lays out his achievements. In verse 15. He sprinkles many nations.

He silences kings. He sets out his truth. And here is this reference given to us. To commend us to him. And we're going to look at that then.

This morning in part. And this evening the final part also. And this is meant to whet our appetite. It's meant to whet our appetite. To read the rest of this.

And study the rest of this. And see who he really is. And hopefully it will whet our appetite. To sit on the Lord's table. Because this is the one that we're going to meet there.

[11 : 54] So let's reflect this morning. On the character. And the way of working. Of the servant of the Lord. Well the servant's character.

Behold my servant shall act wisely. Wisdom is part of his makeup. Doing things in a wise fashion.

Is characteristic of him. Wisdom is not the same as intelligence. A person can be very intelligent. But of no practical use.

A wise person. Is practically useful. He doesn't just know. He understands. He sees into the meaning of things.

He appreciates people's way of thinking. And understands their situation. And knows how to act accordingly. Wisdom is. That's what wisdom is.

[12 : 59] And that's the way the servant is described. He acts wisely. The New Testament tells us about the wisdom of Jesus.

Luke speaks about Jesus as a boy. And he says. And the child grew. And became strong. He was filled with wisdom. And later on.

Jesus grew in wisdom. And in stature. So there's a boy. That sat in the temple. And was discussing things. And displays wisdom.

Beyond his years. He's got an old head and young shoulders. People might see about him. From his earliest days. They said. That's a wise young boy.

And that's the way. They thought about him too. In his ministry. Where did this man get this wisdom. And these miraculous powers. And you can see the wisdom.

[14 : 00] With which Jesus dealt with people. And with situations. He understood them. And appreciated their precision. And acted accordingly.

And that's what wisdom is. Here's a bruised reed. Here's a smouldering wick. We're talking in picture language.

And what does Jesus do? He binds up the bruised reed. So that it will grow straight and tall once again. What does he do with the smouldering wick?

He puts his hand round it. And protects it. Or blows gently on it. Until it rekindles its light. He treats people wisely and gently.

Understanding their difficulties. And appreciating their weakness. But at the same time. He could denounce the Pharisees. In no uncertain terms.

[15 : 00] Because he looked into their hearts. And he understood them as well. He saw this woman. That was shy. And had the hemorrhage. And he deals gently.

Firmly. But gently with her. Because he understands her. He treats people wisely. And how many times did they try and trap him in his words.

And give a riddle to him. A theological riddle to him. To try and make him say something. That would spoil his reputation. In people's eyes. And he saw into their hearts.

And knew their intention. And he avoided the trap. And he put them to silence. With his wisdom. Jesus was wise. He's the servant of God.

He's wise. And understanding. Now I don't think we think enough about the wisdom of God. I certainly didn't. That we don't think enough about the wisdom of Jesus. Jesus.

[15 : 59] But that's worth reflecting on. Because it reflects on the way that we're going to look at him. Really. It's good to know that we're not just dealing with somebody that's just and right.

It's good to know even that we're not dealing with somebody that's gracious and merciful. It's good to know that in his justice and in his grace. He acts also with wisdom.

Because it means that he knows us. And not just does he know us. Which can be kind of forbidding. In knowing our sins and our weaknesses. He understands us.

He looks upon us with sympathy. And it's because of his wisdom that he can do that. So is this somebody that is commended to us by the statement that he acts wisely?

Is this the sort of person that we can look to? That we can trust in? That we can appreciate? That we want to meet with? And surely the answer is when we consider our weakness and our frailty and our failings.

[17 : 10] We appreciate the fact that Jesus deals with us wisely. So that's the first aspect of his character. The servant is wise. And let's appreciate the wisdom of Jesus.

In the kind, gracious and sympathetic way in which he deals with us. Because he knows us and understands us. The second aspect of his character may indeed seem to run counter to what we've said.

To the whole idea of being a servant. But we're told here that he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. He's got a high status.

Now when you put it in that way, you do see that there might be a sort of apparent contradiction here. A servant by definition is somebody that serves.

He's an underling. He's somebody in a lowly position, relatively speaking. And how come therefore that he's got a high status?

[18 : 16] Well I just want to reflect on this a wee bit. In case it's a difficulty. And even if it isn't, just to bring out the significance of this here. It depends first of all of whom you are a servant.

Somebody serving in the kitchen in Buckingham Palace has got a higher status than somebody serving in the kitchen of your local takeaway. Because she's serving royalty.

And that's obviously the case. Ministers of the crown are really servants of the crown. But you don't think about them as servants because of the crown that they're serving.

And that's the way that it is with this servant. Oh yes, he's a servant. And he suffers humiliation. And in some ways his task is a menial task.

And he's got a lowly style of life. But we've never to forget that he is the servant of the Lord. And that in itself gives a certain status to him.

[19 : 23] That helps to explain the fact that he's high and lifted up and exalted. Another way of looking at things is this. I look around a congregation like this and I realise that there aren't too many Scottish people here.

Sometimes I see that in the congregation. Here's a wee bit of Scottish history that maybe even Scottish people don't know very much. Because if I asked, who is William Fitzallan? I'm sure nobody here would be able to tell me.

Even although they'd heard about him in school. William Fitzallan was a nobleman that was made the steward of Scotland. And he served.

He served. He was a servant of the crown. And he served three kings of Scotland successively. A thousand or so years ago. And after him, his son had the same position.

He was steward. Steward, a servant of the king. And in course of time, they ceased to be stewards. And they became stewards.

[20 : 28] And they took the throne themselves. William the steward became, his descendants became Robert Stuart, king of Scotland.

The steward served well. And he came to kingship. And this steward served well. And he came to kingship. The steward is a servant.

But he's highly exalted. And he's given a high status and dignity. And he has given it because of the faithfulness of his service.

Now there are some people that think that these words here that we've got indicate various stages in his exaltation. The first one, he shall be high.

They say, refers to his resurrection. The second one, he shall be lifted up, refers to his ascension. And the third one, he shall be exalted, refers to him sitting at God's right hand.

[21 : 34] Now I'm not sure that we can say that. But I'm sure of this, that all of that is included in what is meant to be brought to our attention here.

This is poetry. And I'm not sure that we've got to press every word of poetry to have a specific meaning. Because it's cumulative. It's one word on top of another giving an impression.

And so he's high, he's lifted up, he's exalted. What impression do you get? Somebody of the highest status imaginable. What we've got here is this.

That God highly exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. Now what does this teach us about the servant?

The servant that became king. The servant that was exalted. Well, I think it speaks about his faithfulness. The stewards of Scotland were faithful to their task and came to the kingship.

[22 : 41] And this servant was faithful to his task. And it was because of that that he was highly exalted. That's what Paul says in the passage that we've referred to.

He became obedient to death. Even death on the cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him. He became a servant. And obeyed God's will.

And fulfilled his purpose. And gave himself in obedience. Even to the extent of dying. Of dying upon the cross. And because of that, he was highly exalted.

Because he was faithful to the task. The reward was given to him. Of being exalted. And that's the practical way that I'm wanting to think about this.

What we've got here is not just a wise servant. But a faithful servant. One that was given a task. And fulfilled it to such an extent.

[23 : 43] That he was rewarded for it. As fully as you could possibly imagine. Being given the name that is above every name. That's the measure of his faithfulness.

The degree of his exaltation. Is a measure of his faithfulness. And if we look to Jesus as exalted Lord. As I'm sure we do.

That's the way we recognize him. We should recognize that that is a measure of his trustworthiness. And that's the way that this servant is put before us here.

A wise and trustworthy servant. Who fully fulfilled all that was given to him to do. Despite what it cost him. Is this somebody that commends himself to us?

Is this somebody that we can trust? And of course if we see him to be trustworthy. That's where faith comes from. Faith doesn't come from looking inside ourselves.

[24 : 43] To see if we're growing in our faith. Faith comes from looking outside ourselves to him. To see how trustworthy he is. And this passage says.

Look how trustworthy he was. He was exalted to the highest degree. Because he was a faithful servant. And that's the way that we can look at him. Is this somebody that we can trust in?

When we see our sins? Yes we can trust in him for forgiveness. Is this somebody that we can trust in? When we recognize our failures? And the fact that we haven't accomplished what we promised?

And we're certainly not what we hoped we would be? Yes. We can trust in him. Because he loved us and gave himself for us. Is this somebody that we can trust in?

To feed us? When we come looking for food at the Lord's table? Of course it is. He's utterly trustworthy. We have the sign of that in the fact that he was highly exalted.

[25 : 43] And given the name that is above every name. So there is the character of the servant. He's wise. He's trustworthy. Faithful to his task.

And so exalted. And that I think is something worth reflecting on. As we think on coming to the Lord's table. Well. Then the second thing that we're going to look at.

Is the servant's method of work. And then this evening all being well. We'll go on and look at the final thing. The servant's achievements. Now this is not at all apparent.

And I do recognize that this is a difficulty. Especially if you're following this translation. Because in verse 14 here. We've got a translation. Well I'm not saying anything wrong with the translation.

I'm just saying it's difficult to translate this verse. And different translations have got different ways of putting it. And the one that I'm going to follow is actually not this one.

[26 : 44] It's one found in the New King James Version. But it's not contradictory to what we've got here. Because it seems to me you see. We've got something that doesn't readily fit together.

As many were astonished at you. So he's speaking about Israel. He's not speaking about the servant here. He's speaking about something that happened to them.

That made people astonished. And then he breaks off according to this translation. In the middle. And speaks about the sufferings of the servant. And we were left with the question.

How does this fit together? Why does he suddenly say many were astonished at you? And then he goes on to speak about the terrible sufferings of the servant. And the answer must be.

Surely that they're connected together in some way. And other translations. Usually older translations. Also take that and translate it like this. Just as many were astonished at you.

[27 : 45] So his visage was marred more than any man. And his form more than the sons of men. And there you see.

You've got a definite correspondence. Between what happened to Israel. To you. And what happened to him. Just as many were astonished at Israel.

So the implication is. That many were astonished at him. For the same sort of reason. That's the idea that lies behind these words. And I hope you find that helpful.

And we'll now try and open that up a wee bit. So he says. Many were astonished at you. What is he talking about? What feature of Israel's experience astonished people?

Or maybe even some people would put it. Appalled them. Well. If we're looking for something. We can find similar statements made.

[28 : 47] In the prophets. That shed light on this. Jeremiah tells of God's judgment on Jerusalem. And he says. I will devastate this city.

And make it an object of scorn. All who pass by. Will be appalled. Because of his wounds. So he's looking at the Jerusalem.

Destroyed by the Babylonians. And he's foreseeing that. And he's foreseeing the reactions of people. This beautiful city. In ruins. It's appalling they say.

Appalling. That this city has been so wounded. And Ezekiel. Speaks about the same sort of thing. The destruction of Jerusalem.

By the Babylonians. Led to people being taken away into exile. Deported to a foreign land. And prior to this. Many had been scattered. To other lands.

[29 : 47] As refugees. And here is Ezekiel. He says. I came to the exiles. Who had been scattered from Jerusalem. Who lived at Tel Aviv.

Which isn't the Tel Aviv in Israel. And there I sat among them. For seven days. Overwhelmed. And that word. Is this word. Appalled.

And both these. Both these passages. Refer. To people. Being appalled. At the suffering. That came to Jerusalem. At the terrible wounds.

That were made in the city. When the Babylonians. Came. And broke down its walls. And burned its palaces. And destroyed it. How it was disfigured. How it was marred.

That's what they're appalled at. That's what they're astonished at. And we got that. Even. In first kings. Before anything happened. Of that nature. First kings nine.

[30 : 42] And though this temple. Is now imposing. All who pass by. Will be appalled. And say. Why has the Lord. Done such a thing. To this land. And to this temple.

They're appalled. Because of God's. Acting against it. Because the Babylonians. Were instruments. In God's hand. Bringing the judgment. That was due to them. Because of their sin.

And that's what people. Are astonished at. When they look at Israel. They're astonished. That that beautiful city. And that chosen people. Have been devastated.

And marred. And disfigured. And destroyed. By God. Because of their sins. And that is a gesture. As a background. To what we've got to think about. In this connection.

Just as many were appalled. At you. So his visage was marred. More than any man. And his form. More than the sons of men. So he's saying.

[31 : 39] In effect. You think about. The terrible sufferings. That are to come. In Jerusalem. How it's going to be. Land's going to be devastated. The city's going to be. Left in ruins.

It's going to be. Wounded. By these Babylonians. And something similar. Has happened. In the case of this servant. Jerusalem was disfigured.

Its face was marred. When the Babylonians. Came against it. And people were appalled at it. And so it's going to be. In this particular case too.

His appearance. Was so marred. Beyond human semblance. And his form beyond that. Of the children of mankind. That what happened to Israel.

It runs parallel. To what's happening to the servant. Disfigurement. And marring. And destruction. In both cases. And of course.

[32 : 37] We just need to think. Of the terrible sufferings. That came upon our Lord. And we realise. How appropriate a way. This is to describe him. He had a crown of thorns.

Placed in his head. And it left his head. Bruised. The flesh bruised and broken. And blood streaming down it. He was slapped.

And he was punched. Leaving their marks on his body. He was whipped about the body. Maybe a scourge. Of leather thongs. With knots in them.

And the knots particularly. Would make their mark. On the flesh. He was nailed to his cross. All his bones were dislocated. Hanging there by his hands.

Without support. The bones would stick out. From his flesh. In an unnatural way. He was disfigured. And marred by sufferings.

[33 : 35] To a supreme degree. And just as that. Disfigurement of Jerusalem. Which appalled people. Was done by the hand of God. So this disfigurement.

Also was done by the hand of God. It pleased the Lord. To crush him. To bruise him. And just as that destruction. Had come for sin. So it is in the case.

Of the marrying. Of the appearance of Christ. The terrible sufferings. That he endured. He was bruised. For our iniquities. He was just tised.

For our sins. It's a parallel. A complete parallel there. As Jerusalem was disfigured. Because God's hand was against it.

Because of its sins. So Jesus was disfigured. Because he was bearing the sins of others. And God's hand was thereby.

[34 : 31] Against him. And that's the description here. That's given of the servant. It's not so easy to see. But once you see it. I hope you see how interesting.

And meaningful. And important that is. It tells him. Tells us the way of his working. He is identified with his people. He shared in their lot.

He did so to such a degree. That he took their very sinfulness in himself. And felt the wrath of God. On account of human sin. He's not just our substitute.

He's our representative. He comes alongside us. And shares our experiences in life. And he was tempted in all points. Like as we are.

And so on. And he knows what it is to suffer hunger. And thirst. And people deserting him. And forsaking him. And misunderstanding him. He knows the whole lot of human experience.

[35 : 30] And he identified himself so thoroughly with our condition. That he made himself an offering for sin. Representing his people. Acting in their name. And that's the method of his working.

As the servant has. As the servant is described here. So there you see. We've got the character of the servant. He acts wisely. But he also is trustworthy.

And therefore was exalted. And the way of his working is. He doesn't stand aloof and say nice words. He comes to us. And becomes one with us.

And represents us. To the degree that he takes our sinfulness upon himself. Is that somebody that commends himself to you. And to your attention.

And to your spiritual needs. And to you as you think in coming to the Lord's Supper. And of course this is absolutely key. We're not going to know forgiveness.

[36 : 28] And we'll have no right to the Lord's Supper. Unless we appreciate this. We're not going to appreciate what's going on in the Lord's Supper. Unless we understand this. The bread and the wine speak to us of the death of Christ.

The blood of the covenant that was shed for us. If we don't have this idea in our minds. Then we needn't bother coming to the Lord's table. And if we did so.

It would be a blasphemy. But if we do have this in our minds. If we're looking to Jesus and saying that's our hope. And despite our faults and feelings. If we're still going to him and saying. Look at me.

And have mercy on me. Because of your death on the cross. If we're not doing that. Then don't come to the Lord's table. And if we are doing that. Then come to have that experience multiplied to us.

Because the symbols of that death. Are going to be presented to us. And we're going to have a better glimpse. Of the servant of the Lord. Who was wise. And trustworthy.

[37 : 27] And who acted in a way. That he was our representative. Carrying our experience. To the extent of dying on the cross for us. May God bless to us his word.