

# Jesus the suffering servant

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So it's March 2012 and it's the end of the opening episode of Britain's Got Talent! Saturday night TV, if you watched it, Simon Cowell's long-running old-fashioned talent contest! with extra kind of flashing lights and so on. And in Britain's Got Talent at that moment the theatre's! packed and the four judges are seated and the live audience are buzzing with anticipation and onto the stage back in March 2012 comes the final act. There's a couple of teenagers, singers so they say, a girl well dressed and made up and by her side Jonathan Antoine. And as Jonathan Antoine comes on the stage and appears there's a kind of intake of breath and gasps and laughs because Jonathan is enormous. He's heavily obese. He's dressed in shades of grey with big lumpy tracksuit bottoms and a cardigan and long lank hair and a pale face poking out and the kind of look in his eyes of someone who's been pointed at for years. He's the very opposite of a 21st century star.

And as you watch the clip on YouTube you see Simon Cowell leaning over to his co-judge and sniggering and saying, just when you think things couldn't get any worse. And the camera pans around and members of the audience take a look at him and glance at each other with raised eyebrows. And Simon speaks to him and his voice drips with sarcasm and do you think you can win? And Jonathan kind of shuffles around nervously and shrugs his shoulders. Pause. It's kind of brutal TV. There's this young man, he's exposed, he's made the choice to go there but he's exposed on the stage in front of onlookers. A kind of another self-deluded loser in life, everything, everyone thinks. And the room goes quiet and one or two shake their heads and there's a moment of Britain's Got Talent tension and the tinny backing track starts up and he makes a start but then stops, he gets it wrong and then finally he opens his mouth. And within about 20 seconds the whole audience kind of rise shamelessly to their feet and cheer wildly because this man his voice is so powerful and so glorious. And you watch as audience members wipe tears from their eyes in the moment as this kind of divine sound washes over them. 115 million people have watched the clip on YouTube since then, 115 million and one when you go home and watch it as he comes on he gets this kind of abuse and then stands and sings and it is such a kind of dramatic gripping moment. One young man, centre stage on a show for stars, there's no beauty in him, onlookers sneering and appalled and turning away before together they rise up and stand at something such unexpected, breathtaking glory in front of them.

In Isaiah chapter 52, if you've got your Bible open here, there is a buzz of anticipation and the stage is set for someone who will change the course of the whole of human history because the book of Isaiah in which this chapter is written tells a story of failure and hope. First off, the failure of humanity and the people of Israel to love and serve our Creator. In Isaiah's day, 700 years before Jesus, the nation of Israel was absolutely corrupt. Pride and empty worship and self-indulgent living and grinding the faces of the poor made Israel repulsive to their God.

And God said, shame and death is coming to you. And yet the people of Israel really, just a reflection in time of all human beings by nature. Failure.

And yet through the prophet Isaiah comes, as you read through these chapters, a mounting message, secondly of hope, as the Lord God promises to restore them, restore humanity, forgive us and change our hearts. And in the book of Isaiah, all God's promises to save the world, funnel down and focus on one individual. From the stump of Israel, there'll be one person who arises. You hear the verses at Christmas, he'll be a king, for to us a child is born, a son is given. The nations will gather to him and of the greatness of his government and of peace there will be no end. This one through whom God will save the world, he'll be a servant and God will delight in him and he'll bring justice to the earth. He'll be a light to the nations and through whom God will save the world then and today. All promised and prophesied in Isaiah. For people in our world today, the curse of death overturned through him, this one man, and peace with God and peace between people forever

through him, this king and servant.

[ 5 : 33 ] Isaiah chapter 40 kind of builds and builds with this expectation. The glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people will see it together. Isaiah chapter 52 is absolutely full of it. Look down at Isaiah 52 verse 7. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, the gospel, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, your God reigns.

Listen, your watchmen lift up their voices, together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion they'll see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. It builds and builds and now finally in 52 verse 13 onwards it's called the fourth servant song the pressure valve is released This famous song and poem is right at the heart of the Bible and written hundreds of years before his coming it points to and shows us the Lord Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is this servant king, Jesus the one who deals with sin and death and death and wins us forgiveness and peace with God and it's his life and death and resurrection we'll see prophesied here this

Sunday and next. But, and here's the thrust of the poem, as God's servant walks onto the stage of history Jonathan Antoine like, this supposed to be moment of glory for the world what an appalling sight he is, how appalling he looks look at this with me as we look at these verses this fourth servant song and notice firstly chapter 52 verses 13 to 15 notice the shock of the servant verse 13 starts really normally if you'll see what I mean see says God my servant will act wisely he'll succeed he'll be raised and lifted up and highly exalted which would be right in Isaiah the Lord is half lifted up and highly exalted that's the proper place for God's servant king

Jesus and when he's succeeding in his mission he will be raised and exalted to the highest place and given the name that's above every name that's right but now verse 14 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 so he will sprinkle many nations and kings will shut their mouths because of him for what they were not told they will see and what they've not heard they will understand as they see God's servant people are appalled they shudder in horror because his appearance is so disfigured and his face so marred he looks barely human during the Falklands war 35 years ago Simon Weston who's sort of famous now in a sense

Simon Weston was on board the landing ship Sir Galahad in Bluff Cove in the Falklands when it was bombed and set on fire and Simon Weston survived with 46% burns and his face kind of melted and he recalls quote my first encounter with a really low point was when they wheeled me into the transit hospital at RAF Lynan and I passed my mother in the corridor and she said to my gran oh ma'am look at that poor boy and I cried out ma'am it's me and as she recognised my voice her face turned to stone kind of barely recognisable that's what these verses are talking about and they transport us to the moment that Jesus dies on a Roman cross for as he hung attached to the wood the sign above him read the king of the Jews that is who he is and yet in the hours leading up to that point he'd been flogged with a heavy leather whip weighted with pieces of bone and metal flaying him and tearing him he was beaten and stripped and spat on and a crown of thorns pressed into him and finally he'd been pierced and nailed up and by the time he bowed his head we should imagine so battered was he that he barely resembled human likeness that's what Isaiah 52 is telling us pointing forward to saying that were we to have actually been there at the foot of the cross we'd have shuddered in horror at a sight so appalling just as there were many who were appalled at him verse 14 so verse 15 you see he will sprinkle many nations i think it actually means he will startle many nations and kings will shut their mouths because of him as the message of Jesus disfigured and crucified spreads to the nations it leaves people speechless and stunned into silence what a contrast

[ 11 : 51 ] Isaiah 52 had trumpeted all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God the salvation of our God and now see Jesus bowed and broken and battered these verses i think meant to be unsettling in a way for people over familiar with the cross shocking servant those who looked on him appalled Isaiah takes us next to the life of this servant Jesus first the shock of the servant second now do you see the suffering of the servant and verses one to three who has believed our message this gospel 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 verse 2 describes seems to me the first steps of Jesus which are so unmajestic he grew up before his God like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground

I don't think you can't but think of his birth his fragile beginnings and growing up like a little plant struggling for life in unwatered ground next verse 2 look at his face he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him nothing in his appearance that we should desire him when Jesus the saviour of the world comes he's so plain and ordinary as we say at Christmas not standing out from the crowd model like beauty like those religious paintings not flawless skin high cheekbones wavy blonde hair droopy blue eyes he had no beauty or majesty nothing stand out or attractive were your eyes to pass him in the street were you to pass him in the street your eyes would flicker across him just one of the crowd a regular five foot something sweating jewish man maybe even pig ugly nothing in his appearance that we should desire him he's earthy and undesirable and plain the servant of god as he comes really important actually in brackets to to keep saying that he's not a beautiful saviour for beautiful people and so if someone today is very aware of their own unattractiveness and how ordinary and unnoticed you are the lord Jesus was like you church is meant to be his first steps his face now look at his treatment 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 notice that twice over here despised despised despised the word means held in contempt treated as worthless unworthy of attention like the plastic wrappings of your sandwich kind of rubbish to be thrown out

Jonathan Antoine in his lumpy tracky bottoms standing on stage sneered at and despised if you've ever been called a worthless piece of dirt you're useless you're a nobody that's what we're talking about here which was the experience of god's servant despised and the mocking and the mocking and the insults that come with it you read in the gospels in the hours leading up to his death on the cross he was tossed from one group to another and spat on and struck and slapped and stripped and mocked and pushed around despised and worthless and verse 3 rejected by mankind all the world bar none against him as even Peter and his closest disciples all peeled away and fled and left him utterly alone you're a loser deserted no touch of human comfort or help despised despised rejected verse 3 now suffering do you see a man a solitary man now of suffering and familiar with pain sickness or weakness the very opposite of attractive glory in view here I think the physical and emotional and spiritual suffering that the lord Jesus underwent certainly through the course of his life as he endured the barbs and the accusations of those against him as he absorbed into himself the sickness and suffering of those he healed but finally at the end of his life a ramping up of suffering J.C. Ryle 19th century bishop wrote these words the most savage tribes in their refinement of cruelty could hardly have heaped more agonizing tortures on an enemy than were heaped on the flesh and bones of our beloved master never let it be forgotten that he had a real human body a body exactly like our own just as sensitive just as vulnerable just as capable of feeling intense pain and then let us see what that body endured well as you know as they held his exhausted body down they drove nails through his hands into the cross piece and nailed his feet to the upright and then hoisted up the cross and fixed him firmly and there he hung naked and bleeding and gasping for breath John Stott writes it is the most cruel method of execution ever practiced for it deliberately delayed death until maximum torture had been inflicted were we to have been there that first good Friday how would we have responded to such shameful public weakness and suffering end of verse three like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised and we held him in low esteem I mention every year or so that early piece of graffiti from the second century discovered in Rome which is a crude drawing of a cross this piece of graffiti and stretched on it a man with the head of a donkey and to the left stands another man with one arm raised in worship and scribbled underneath are the words

Al examinos worships God you're meant to sense the sneer and the scorn behind that to Al examinos this beaten piece of humanity appalling and ugly and alone is that your salvation is that your God whom you worship would I have stood alongside Jesus and held him in high