

Isaiah 52:13-53

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[0 : 00] Well, what do you reckon is our greatest problem?

The thing most fateful that we face with the greatest prospects of undoing us. Terrorism, maybe what we will become when we try to fight terrorism.

World hunger. Religious and ethnic violence, perhaps. Or maybe global warming. National debt. Third world poverty.

There are a good number of plausible contenders. Well, how about personally? Financial stress. Chronic, debilitating health issues.

Bad or abusive relationships. A seemingly unshakable, destructive habit. The long, wearying failure to find love.

[1 : 08] These are hard things. And even harder is the question, what do we do about them? How can they be overcome?

Well, the passage before us this morning takes up this very question. What is our greatest problem? What is our greatest problem?

Both corporately, the whole world of humanity, and individually. Each one of us. What is the thing we face that really can crush us?

That will really sink us. Well, our passage gives us its answer to that vital question. But further, it gives us an answer to the inevitable and vital follow-up question.

What can be done about it? Is there any hope in the face of our greatest problem? Now, we ought not to be surprised if our text strikes our modern ears as strange and alien in parts.

[2 : 19] I mean, after all, the author, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, is writing from a time and a place very different from our own. And some would suspect that Isaiah's distance from us is so great that nothing he could possibly say could have any relevance to us today.

But this, I think, is a mistake. For surely the fact that we don't have in common things like cell phones or cellophane is far less important than that we do have in common flesh and blood.

We are all of the same humanity. So as we read our passage, don't be put off by maybe the strangeness, the foreignness of it. We'll work through that together.

It contains a message well worth the effort to understand it. Let me read it for us. I was going to say you can follow on, but actually my translation is different.

So maybe you'll just listen. But have your Bibles ready because I will refer to them. Isaiah 52. My print just keeps getting smaller and smaller, it seems.

[3 : 33] This is a first, and you witnessed it. Borrowed glasses. Okay. Isaiah 52. I'm beginning verse 13. Behold, my servant will prosper.

He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, my people, so his appearance was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.

Thus he will sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths on account of him. For what has not been told them, they will see. And what they had not heard, they will understand.

Who has believed our message? And to whom is the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a tender shoot, like a root out of parched ground. He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to him.

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their face.

[4 : 48] He was despised, and we did not esteem him. Surely our griefs he himself bore, and our sorrows he carried. Yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well-being fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed.

All of us, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep that is silent before his shears.

So he did not open 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 for the transgressions of my people to whom the stroke was due?

His grave was assigned with the wicked men, yet he was with a rich man in his death. Because he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth, but the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief.

[6 : 12] If he would render himself as a guilt offering, he will see his offspring. He will prolong his days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

As a result of the anguish of his soul, he will see it and be satisfied. By his knowledge, the righteous one, my servant, will justify the many, as he will bear their iniquities.

Therefore, I will allot him a portion with the great, and he will divide the booty with the strong, because he poured out himself to death and was numbered with the transgressors.

Yet he himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors. So, what is identified here as our greatest problem?

Well, it's most clearly stated in the first part of verse 6. When I refer to just verses 6 on through, that'll be chapter 53. If I'm referring to 52, I'll say 52.

[7 : 24] Verse 6. Now, it may strike you as an odd reading practice to jump right in in the middle of our piece here, but it really isn't that odd for Hebrew poetry, of which this is, because in Hebrew poetry, a lot of the times, the themes often work themselves in parallel from the beginning and the end in toward the middle with the heart of the matter being revealed in the middle.

And so here, the heart of the matter is the center of the poem. And here we find Isaiah expressing the heart of the matter when it comes to our biggest problem.

And here's how he puts it. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have each turned to his own way. Well, I wonder if you find that a surprising answer.

It's not that people in Isaiah's day didn't face plagues or hunger or the ravages of war, disease, deportment, inflation, poverty, these things that we might guess would be the biggest problems.

No, these things were all very conspicuously present. Isaiah simply identifies a more fundamental, root-level problem, our going astray, turning each one to our own way, as he puts it.

[8 : 50] So what does Isaiah mean? Straying from what? Turning away from what? Well, notice his image is that of sheep. The picture is of sheep straying from the path marked out by a shepherd.

So who is the shepherd? Well, of this, there was no question in Isaiah's hearer's minds. The picture was perfectly clear and a very familiar one to them.

As their King David opened in his famous psalm, Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. Or as the people often recited in a psalm, Psalm 100, know that the Lord himself is God.

It is he who made us and not we ourselves. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. So the shepherd is God our Creator.

It's from the path God marks out that we stray. When we go our own way, we are turning aside from the Creator's way.

[9 : 58] So Isaiah is saying that common to us all is waywardness with respect to God our Creator.

Ours is an attitude, each one of us is an attitude, which is saying, I don't care as to the path that you've marked out, God.

I will be in your world as I jolly well please. I will set the course, my own course, without regard to you.

I will make my own way, thank you very much. Really, a moment's reflection reveals that to go our own way is to make ourselves our own authority.

It's to repudiate our shepherd God. It's to regard the very Creator as a rival. It's to take the defiant stance of a rebel.

[11 : 06] I shall play the part of God in my own life. I shall be the arbiter of what is good and right and just for me.

The effects of this turning aside from the ways of our Creator are varied and terrible. From genocide to a lack of generosity, from selfishness to suicide attacks, from sex trafficking to the spoilage of our earth, we have made a ruinous mess of things.

We have vandalized God's world, and we have victimized God's creatures, our fellow men. Yes, the effects of our chosen paths are bad enough.

I mean, they're bad enough for us to think that they're our worst problems. But the essence of our chosen path, that is what is supremely morally horrifying.

We have substituted ourselves for God, put ourselves in His place. And that, according to Isaiah, is our greatest problem.

[12 : 26] And notice the problem is global. Verse 6, All of us. That is the collective way of humanity.

But it's also our personal problem. It says, Each one of us. We can't hide in the corporation or in the crowd. We are each individually offenders.

As Isaiah says, We each take our own way. We each put our own idiosyncratic spin on our rebellion against God.

We each have our own signature peace, signature peace way of parting from the Creator's paths. For one, it may be a contemptuous superiority.

For another, a refinement of cruelty. Another, a degrading of others for their pleasure. Here a cowardice. There a carelessness.

[13 : 27] Here a truthlessness. It's a hellish menagerie. And we all find it so intoxicating to make ourselves our own God.

The virus has gotten into our blood. It's twisted our nature. Notice the two words that Isaiah uses to elucidate our straying.

It's not just sins, which he uses in verse 12. Single straying acts. But, verse 5, transgressions. That's what makes these acts so serious.

They are transgressions of our Creator's authority and person. Willful acts of defiance. The central citadel of our sinfulness is our insubordinate will.

I know this is abhorrent to God, and yet I choose it. And then also, verse 5, the word, descriptive word, iniquities.

[14 : 39] Iniquities comes from the Hebrew for bent. Our rebellion has bent us at the core. Nothing straight springs from us any longer.

So this is the measure and the depth of our problem. I wonder if you've noticed the symptoms of this virus in your own life.

Do you not chafe against the shepherd? Are you not determined to pick out your own way, even though he is your creator?

Tell me you do not know in your heart that Isaiah's description is true of you.

It certainly is of me. And Isaiah knew it was true of him. Notice his statement is in the form of a confession. He places himself in with the company.

[15 : 41] All we like sheep have gone astray. Can you make that confession? My biggest problem is I have substituted myself for God.

I have made God my rival. Well, if so, then the second question forces itself upon us with great urgency.

What can be done? What can be done about it? Now, the people of Isaiah's day had been long taught to understand that such a stance toward God was deserving of His terrible and just judgment.

Death. Death. That much was clear. The whole sacrificial system acknowledged and reinforced that death was due transgressors.

An endless parade of bulls and goats and sheep were offered on altars to atone for the sins of the people.

[16 : 49] But the sense was that the blood of bulls and goats couldn't really constitute atonement for sin.

It was simply postponement. Animals were no ultimate answer. So the question remained, what can be done about the fact that we keep piling up capital offenses against the very judge of the universe?

It does not look good for us. To be sober-minded in this matter is to grow pale. But look at the remarkable answer Isaiah gives.

To deal with this, our greatest problem, God is sending someone, His servant. The opening of our passage, 52-13, Behold my servant.

Now, Isaiah makes reference to the Lord's servant. He's made reference to him before. Sometimes it refers collectively to Israel as a nation. Then more narrowly to a faithful remnant within a faithless nation.

[18 : 09] Once the title is given to the pagan king Cyrus as one who does God's bidding. But this time it's different. For this time the servant is identified with the arm of the Lord.

There in verse 1, 53 verse 1. Now, this is remarkable. For the designation arm of the Lord is none other than a metaphor for God Himself.

If you glance back at Isaiah 51-9 where the phrase occurs, Put on strength, O arm of the Lord. Awake as in the days of old. It is then that he goes on to speak of God's mighty acting to bring the created order out of chaos.

And then describes the rescuing His people from Egypt, Egyptian bondage, making a pathway through the depths of the sea, opening the Red Sea. The arm of the Lord is God rolling up His sleeves to act Himself with great power.

Let me make a quick observation to hopefully clarify where there is typically and tragically much confusion.

[19 : 35] Notice how God's solution to humanity's problem involves His arm, not just His mouth. It's not enough to send a prophet, a mouthpiece, a spokesman, to tell us how to get out of this mess that we've made.

It takes His coming down Himself and acting. If your notion of Christianity is about instruction, how we ought to live, and who could be faulted for thinking so?

For that's what all religions consist in, isn't it? Instruction on how to live. But if we get what Isaiah is saying here, we realize this is something very different.

It is not fundamentally religious instruction. It is about God Himself coming down and acting. That's why Christianity very distinctively is not advice but announcement.

Not, this is how you can change your life. Rather, this is what happened that changes your life. It's fundamentally news, or as the first Christians called it, the good news.

[21 : 04] The good news that they declared all over. So, what can be done about our terrible plight? God is sending someone, His servant.

But this servant is none other than the arm of the Lord. God Himself come down to act in person. I mean, no wonder He says at the start, Behold!

I mean, you're telling me. This I want to see. God Himself coming down to act. We've seen His arm before. The plagues of Egypt.

The angel of death. Splitting the Red Sea apart. The Jordan River. The walls of Jericho coming down. Surely we'll see lots of fireworks. But this is the odd, the very odd thing.

The profile of the servant Isaiah gives us is not what we would expect. In fact, it's closer to the opposite of what we'd expect.

[22 : 08] Even as he describes the servant, Isaiah recognizes this. Verse 1, who is going to believe this? So, what's so unlikely or implausible about the profile?

For one, the servant is an unimpressive, inglorious figure. When he appears, there will be nothing in his origin to nourish any greatness.

Verse 2, he will grow up like a root out of parched ground. Neither is there any outward attractiveness to him. Verse 2 again, he has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him.

No appearance that we should be attracted to him. Why, in fact, 52, verse 12, verse 14, his appearance was marred more than any man's.

Clearly, this servant is not the heroic figure of folk legends, a glorious warrior god from Valhalla. That he was able to accomplish something great as he was is frankly a shock.

[23 : 23] Why, even kings, it says, typically known for discernment, why, even kings are utterly mystified upon grasping what he accomplishes. They are, 52, 15, speechless.

Supremely, the servant is a suffering figure. Verse 3, he was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their face.

This simply reinforces the impression on onlookers that he is of no account. Verse 3, we did not esteem him. We add him up and pronounce him as zero, count him as nothing.

But there was something haunting about him. While suffering is the common lot of all, there is something extreme in his.

He is, verse 5, pierced through. He's crushed. He's scourged. Verse 8, he's the victim of oppression and injustice, and finally meets a violent death.

[24 : 38] He is cut off of the land of the living. All this naturally generates the impression that he must somehow be under the special judgment of God.

Verse 4, we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, the special recipient of divine punishment.

Then in a way, Isaiah tells us this is true. Verse 10, the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief.

His fate, it would seem, compels our conclusion that he must have been terribly guilty, and God gave him what he deserved. But the fact is, the odd inexplicable thing is he was innocent.

Verse 9, he has done no violence, nor is there any deceit in his mouth. Pure indeed in word, a clean slate.

[25 : 47] So if not for his own sins and offenses, why is he punished by God? Why is he marked out for horrendous suffering? Is this a hemorrhaging of justice?

What's going on? Well, happily, where clarity is most needed, Isaiah is most transparently clear.

Verse 4, surely our griefs he himself bore, and our sorrows he carried. Verse 5, he was pierced through for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well-being fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed. Why does the servant suffer?

Because he is, verse 10, a guilt offering. He is a sacrificial lamb, verse 7. That is an offering to God to compensate for all the violations of transgressors.

[26 : 54] The background here for Isaiah's first years is the very familiar world of ritual sacrifice in which the Hebrews lived. The guilty party would lay their hand on the head of the animal.

In identification, this is the fate I deserve. And in symbolizing a transfer of guilt to the offering.

So the servant suffers as a substitute for sinners. Were it not so clear, we would scarcely dare believe it.

He, God himself come down, gives his life for us. He takes the lash for rebellion for us. To whom the stroke was due, verse 8.

The servant is treated by God as if he had done every vile thing we have done and do. The innocent servant takes hold of everything that blights our lives.

[28 : 09] Our griefs, our infirmities, sorrows, afflictions, follies, rebellion. He takes them up and he faces their consequences. Remember the poetic structure places verse 6, center stage.

The first half of the verse gives us the heart of the problem. And now the second half supplies the heart of the only solution. And interestingly, the final line of the couplet is in the whole poem uniquely and jarringly cut short, giving it further emphasis.

But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him. Our great calamity, we substitute ourselves for God.

Our only rescue, God substitutes himself for us. No wonder even kings, quite accustomed to beholding marvels, are silenced in awe, 52.15, when they see and comprehend.

And what does this great substitution accomplish? 52.15, a sprinkling of many nations. Drawn from the language of Jewish ritual, sprinkling meant cleansing, as a leper would be sprinkled and declared clean.

[29 : 42] And it meant consecration. The Israelites rescued from Egypt were sprinkled before entering the promised land. And it is a cleansing by removal.

For the servant to have borne our iniquities, verse 4, is to have borne them away. The Hebrew for bear also means to bear away.

To have placed, to have our sin placed on him is to have them removed from us. Again, in the world of Hebrew ritual, this was depicted by the two goats.

Remember, there were two. There is the sacrificial goat, the payment required, death. And then the scapegoat, or the escape goat that was led into the wilderness, never to be seen again.

The removal of the consequences of sin. Verse 11 expresses what this substitution accomplished in a slightly different light.

[30 : 46] It says, He justified many. In this substitution, there is a double exchange. Not only does he, the servant, take the consequences of our wicked and wayward lives, we, in exchange, receive the credit for everything the servant did and was.

My righteous servant will justify, that is, provide righteousness, his own. He steps into our shoes, and we step into his.

Really? Really? But this sounds altogether too remarkable. Can this really be so? As Isaiah would later record, my ways are not your ways.

As the heaven is higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways. And this is his way. This rescue is not some humanly conceived hopeful gambit.

It is the arm of the Lord. God himself accomplishes it. So God can say, 52, 13, My servant will prosper. The good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

[32 : 08] Verse 10. He will accomplish this. The servant will see the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Verse 11. What is this satisfying outcome of the travail of his soul?

It is the rescued many from whom he stood, for whom he stood as substitute. And notice that the servant was smitten. He's cut off.

Yet strangely, he lives to see the fruit of his work. 52, 13. He's no memorial to a dead hero.

The servant is a living victor, high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Here then is Isaiah's portrait of the suffering servant.

Now, although he presented it, he couldn't himself penetrate it. We're told in 1 Peter 1, 9, that the prophets themselves puzzled over their own words, seeking to know what person or time their prophecy referred to.

[33 : 17] But there would come a day when there would be no doubt who this suffering servant was. And it would be this very passage of Isaiah which would prove the most precious and important to the first Christians, for it, above all others, helped them to grasp what God was doing and how it related to this Jesus who had turned their world upside down.

Can you see how this prophecy, such a mystery, was seen to be in the light of Jesus? Such a match? If you're at all familiar with the gospel accounts, you can't fail to see.

As the servant, as with the servant, so with Jesus. Nothing about his origin nourished hopes of greatness. Jesus of Nazareth? Sputters Nathaniel in incredulity.

Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Special? Him? Is this not the carpenter's son? Just a local nobody.

We reckon him to be a zero. And a man of sorrows acquainted with grief? Grief was his intimate acquaintance. Sorrow was his constant companion.

- [34 : 39] Scarcely had he begun his ministry, than the religious leaders are planning how they can kill him and dispatch him. The pressure of sorrow was so intense that at one point, it comes out in sweat, the size of drops of blood.

You? A king? Scoffs Herod in derision. His only royal robe, Herod's, draped in mockery.

His only crown, thorns. The hoarse cries of the crowd, yelling, crucify him! Crucify him! Only interspersed with Pilate's thrice-repeated verdict.

Innocent! I find no fault in him. He has done no evil. The crowd cries out, but he holds his peace. Verse 7.

Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep silent before his shears, he did not open his mouth. Pilate has him scourged, really, as an equivalent of crucifixion.

- [35 : 43] But the crowd is not assuaged, and it proves only a preface to crucifixion. He is crushed beneath the burden of the cross, then pierced through upon it.

The title above him, King of the Jews, so incongruous with his tortured, twisted form, it serves only as mockery and a prompt for taunts.

Then when he finally breaks the silence, he cries out, not for revenge, but Father, forgive. Yes, and as Isaiah foretold, his grave was assigned with the wicked, verse 9, for his body was to be flung in a common grave with criminals, the two that flanked him, for a start, on the cross.

But the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea interposes, asking for the body to place in his own tomb, and so he was with a rich man in his death. But as Isaiah's prophecy cryptically indicated, his inglorious death was not the end for him, for, verse 10, he will prolong his days.

He would see his offspring, the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. The Lord himself takes up the final words of the prophecy as the final verdict upon the servant.

- [37 : 08] Verse 12, Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he will divide the booty with the strong. The servant proves to be, despite all appearance, a victor.

Friends, the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus fits Isaiah's prophecy like a hand in its glove. Jesus is the suffering servant.

He is the arm of the Lord. He is God come down to act in power for our rescue. This, the first Christians saw with clarity, and as we saw with Philip and the Ethiopian, they proclaimed it unhesitatingly.

The mystery was dissolved, and really it was dissolved both ways. Jesus dissolves the mystery of Isaiah's cryptic prophecy, but Isaiah's prophecy also dissolved the great mystery of Jesus.

For the great, inexplicable question for Jesus' followers was this. If Jesus was indeed God's chosen servant, whom he greatly loved, and we heard the Father say as much from heaven, how could God let Jesus come to such a terrible end on the cross?

- [38 : 32] Indeed, as they knew from Scripture, anyone hanged on a tree is especially cursed of God. How could the anointed of God be the cursed of God?

How could the faithful servant of God suffer the frightful judgment of God? It just didn't add up for them. But it was Isaiah's prophecy which provided the answer.

The servant of God was cursed by God in our place as our substitute. And it all came together as the strangest and yet most glorious good news.

Now, it's likely some of you are thinking, well, I'm glad for them that it all makes sense and that they got their questions answered, but I still have a few.

For one, this whole notion of sacrifice at the center of Isaiah's vision, just, it sounds so primitive. On the order of propitiating angry gods by dropping virgins and volcanoes.

[39 : 46] I mean, you can't expect modern people to credit such a thing. Well, this is certainly an understandable reaction, given that we are in our sensibilities largely heirs of the Enlightenment, for whom primitive simply means unenlightened, a.k.a. stupid.

But the question for us is, dare we be so dismissive of all things primitive?

For in this case, by primitive, we are identifying a strong and deep intuition, as ancient as history itself, and near universal across cultures, an instinct that we are and live in relation to a reality beyond us.

Not just forces, but a being. And that we are alienated from that being and need reconciliation, and that some cleansing, some propitiation, must transpire to affect that reconciliation.

Now, we can pronounce all such notions mumbo-jumbo, but let us at least be aware that in so doing, we part company with the overwhelming majority of mankind across time and place, and that it is Isaiah's framework which stands in resonance with those deep and abiding human instincts.

[41 : 25] Perhaps that should give us pause. Some here find difficulty with the notion of substitution. How can a God be considered just and good who, in remedy for the offenses of some, punishes in their stead an innocent third party?

Well, of course, on that apprehension of the matter, the revulsion is understandable. But this would be a grave misapprehension.

For the suffering servant is not an innocent victim seized upon, but rather one who willingly put himself forward as a substitute.

His life was not taken from him. He laid it down voluntarily. Neither, as we discovered, is the suffering servant some third party God punishes.

He is the arm of the Lord, God Himself, taking the lash of His own judgment. Here, substitution is the voluntary self-offering of God.

[42 : 36] And rightly understood, evokes not scandal, but marvel. Now, some are finding it hard to swallow that this effect that Isaiah presents of supposed universal significance, the sprinkling of many nations, arises from so local a drama, a single sufferer in first-century Palestine.

Why, if God were really doing something so universal, would it play out with such a cultural particularity?

A Jew in Palestine of the first century, it just seems odd. Yeah, it does seem odd, doesn't it? As one put it, how odd of God to choose the Jews. Well, the explanation, I think, has to do with the nature of substitution.

No sacrificial animal can be a real substitute for a person. A person is needed. So God became, in Jesus, a human person.

But in becoming one, He has to become a particular one with culture and language and gender and ethnicity and cultural situatedness, for there is no generic person.

[44 : 03] He has to be someone in particular. Particularity is the constraint of substitution. God might have become Japanese or Javan over Jewish, but He had to become someone in all its particularities and historical locatedness.

Now, some of you are probably thinking, okay, okay, but this is all still so strange. Well, was this not Isaiah's point precisely?

Who would have believed that this is the arm of the Lord, the saving action of God in the world? Well, will you miss of it for its strangeness?

Let me ask you, through what lens are you looking for God? What fancies dictate your expectations in relation to God's action in the world, in relation to you?

What good reason do you have for those fancies to dictate, to form the lens through which you will look for God and discern His working?

[45 : 13] Be careful that you have not screened out the divine provision, the only provision there is for your greatest problem, a problem so great it will ultimately crush you apart from a substitute.

Will yours be as the eye of Sauron scanning the landscape for the ring, never thinking to look for a hobbit, but a hobbit was the ring bearer.

But some of us here face a different challenge. The arm of the Lord is for us not unfamiliar, but over-familiar.

We've been instructed from Sunday school up, we've heard sermons, we've sung songs about Jesus, the suffering servant, but familiarity does not mean beneficiary.

It is very possible to penetrate the identity of the suffering servant, and yet his sacrifice not to propitiate for your sins.

[46 : 27] As with the sacrificial goat, one must place one's hand on the head of the victim in identification.

My sin rightly would place me there. The Hebrew word for placing on of the hand implies a leaning hard, placing the full weight of one's reliance upon the sacrifice, for there is no other expiation.

Have you done this? Placed your full weight upon God's suffering servant, admitting your transgressions against God, that they rightly put you in the place of death, and adhering to Him as your substitute with all the weight of your complete reliance.

In Hebrew, the final word of Isaiah's song here is appeal. the servant's appeal for transgressors. Let me make this my final word to you.

I appeal to you as God's ambassador, be reconciled to God by taking and trusting Jesus as your substitute.

[47 : 56] If you do, you may go on your way, as did the Ethiopian rejoicing. For I tell you, in this great gift of a substitute is gathered up all you can ever need.

For if we have the substitute, do we not have all things? In our substitute, we have a panpharmacon, a cure for all things, a salve for every malady.

Do you stand before your mirror with a tear running down, feeling you lack beauty in the eye of the beholder?

Don't you see that he saw in you such beauty? He was willing to lay aside his own beauty, his own ravishingly, blinding, heavenly beauty, and become for you ugly, horrifyingly ugly, so unappealing that beholders turned aside their gaze.

All this to have you as his own forever. Know that you are beautiful in his eyes.

[49 : 20] He loves you so much he gave himself for you. take this servant song into your soul and not only will you feel beautiful in the eyes of your beloved beholder, it will begin to make you beautiful in all the places it really matters.

Do you feel crushed under the burden to achieve your performance, by your performance, cut a figure that garners approval and applause?

Are your nights haunted with the terrors of failing to meet the standard, of being found out a failure? You toil on frantically to make the grade, to get the record that gains the verdict approved, accepted, all the while knowing you are ever only as good as your last performance.

Such toil is unending, and your record is fragile and faltering. But remember, the substitute exchanges your record for his.

He steps into your shoes, and you into his. By his record, not yours, you are justified. He took your place in court, and the verdict is in, accepted.

[50 : 54] You are in the sight of God the judge, as good as the substitute's performance. What resting joy is there in that the verdict is in?

What more security do you need than to know that the one whose verdict alone really matters? The one who knows all you are and all you aren't and never will be, has declared immutably you are perfect in his sight.

There and there alone is real deep rest, rest for the soul. Are you sinking beneath woes and trials?

Ah, but remember, the substitute bore for you and has borne away all and everything that can truly destroy you.

And what is left of pain and sorrow can only vex and try, but it cannot crush you. It was this confidence that allowed the first Christians to say to their tormentors, you cannot hurt us, you can only kill us.

[52 : 11] And in your distress, remember, he is moved by compassion. It was compassion for you which moved him from heaven's throne to a cross.

He will not deal carelessly with those who cost him so dearly. You are the travail of his soul. You are his reward.

Oh, friends, to have the great substitute is to have all things. Take him by trust, and you may go on your way, whatever that way holds, rejoicing indeed for all eternity, for even death itself will not suffer you from the love of your substitute, for his love is stronger than death, and he will raise you up out of the grave to be with him on this restored earth, rejoicing evermore in and with our great Savior.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, here is our hope.

There is no other. As Isaiah would ask elsewhere, is there any other rock? I know of none. If our thirst be not quenched here, we will die of thirst.

[53 : 52] Thank you for opening a fountain for our cleansing. Lord, open our eyes that we might behold this, the wondrous thing that you have done.

What love is this that you would provide a solution for our greatest crushing problem, your very self.

Thank you, Father. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.