

# The Suffering Servant

**Text: Isaiah 53:1-12**

## Introduction

1. Isaiah 53 is perhaps the greatest Messianic prophecy in the Bible. It contains a detailed description of the Messiah's sufferings for sin approximately 700 years before Christ was born.
2. Isaiah 53 is at the heart of the second section of Isaiah (chapters 40-66) is this description of the Messiah's atonement, because this lies at the heart of God's plan of redemption.
3. Isaiah 53 is the most quoted chapter in the New Testament.
4. Isaiah 53 presents the three main points of the Gospel in prophetic form – the death, burial and resurrection of Christ are all in view in this chapter.
5. Christ is presented in this chapter as the righteous servant of Jehovah (Vs. 11). Christ came in obedience to the Heavenly Father to do His will. His greatest act of service was when Christ carried the sins of the world to the cross and paid for them in His own life's blood.
6. In this message we are going to focus on six points this prophecy presents concerning Jehovah's Suffering Servant. The emphasis will be upon Christ's substitutionary death on our behalf.

## I. THE SONSHIP OF THE SERVANT (Vs. 1-2)

### A. The Prophet's Questions (Vs. 1)

1. Who hath believed our report? (Vs. 1a) The Jews would be reluctant to receive the Divine report of their own Messiah, a sad reality that continues to this day. But it is not just the Jewish people. Many in the world refuse to believe God's own Word concerning His Son.
2. To whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? (Vs. 1b) The arm of the LORD speaks of God's Almighty strength and power. We see the mighty power of God displayed in His plan of redemption that He accomplished through His Son. The Suffering Servant is the grandest manifestation of God's power. "When God made the universe, He used His fingers (Ps. 8:3), and when He delivered Israel from Egypt, it was by His strong hand (Ex. 13:3). But to save lost sinners, He had to bare His mighty arm." (Wiersbe)

### B. The Prophets Description (Vs. 2)

This verse emphasizes the humanity and the humility of Christ.

1. His humanity (Vs. 2a)
  - a. A tender plant – describes Christ's growth before His Heavenly Father, especially His growth through childhood into manhood. J. Flanigan "In the wilderness of this world our Lord grew fragrantly for the pleasure of God. Whether in Galilee, or

Samaria, or in Judea, He continually and consistently refreshed the heart of His Father. Men did not appreciate Him. They did not recognize His moral beauty. But He grew up “before him.” The eye of God was ever upon Him with Divine satisfaction and delight.”

- b. A root out of dry ground – Christ is called the “root of Jesse” (Is. 11:10) The Glorified Christ referred to Himself in Revelation 22:16 as follows: “I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.” Normally a root will not spring up in dry ground. The dry ground speaks of the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. In spite of their spiritual deadness and blindness, Messiah sprang up by the power of Almighty God. The spiritual barrenness of a sinful world could not stop His Divine life from springing up. “Christ was a root out of the dry ground of humanity in that He was the sinless man who came out of a sinful people. It refers to the virgin birth by which the Son of God became a man yet without sin.” (Cloud)

2. His humility (Vs. 2b)

Christ laid aside His heavenly glory to come to earth. He came in great humility (Phil. 2:5-11). Undoubtedly there is also reference to Christ’s appearance here. He was a plain looking, Jewish man. He was not a head turning, Hollywood hulk as He is often portrayed in movies and artwork.

- a. No form
- b. No comeliness
- c. No beauty

## II. THE SORROWS OF THE SERVANT (VS. 3-4)

Christ is called the man of sorrows. Because Christ was the sinless, Son of God, He felt sorrow in a way we cannot fully understand as sinful creatures.

### A. Christ’s Acquaintance with Sorrows (Vs. 3)

1. Despised of Men – this was true of Israel during Christ’s earthly ministry and it is still true today.
2. Rejected of Men – this is further described in the words “and we hid as it were our faces from him”. Christ came unto His own and His own received Him not (John 1:11).
3. Note: The greater your love is for someone, the greater your grief will be if they reject you. When you think about how much Christ loves us, the magnitude of His sorrow at being rejected is beyond our comprehension.
4. “The greater the love, the greater the sorrow of the loving heart when its love is spurned. The intenser the yearning for companionship, the

sharper the pang when it is repulsed. The more one longs to bless, the more one suffers when his blessings are flung off. Jesus was the most sensitive, the most sympathetic, the most loving soul that ever dwelt in flesh.” (Maclaren, pg. 310)

5. Challenge: Do you despise the Christ of God. Are you rejecting Him or His way of salvation? Are you hiding from Christ?

#### **B. Christ's Acceptance of our Sorrows (Vs. 4)**

Christ bore and carried our griefs and sorrows.

1. This was fulfilled in Christ's earthly ministry Matthew 8:17 quotes this verse in relation to Christ's healing of the sick – "...Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Sickness and sorrow are the byproduct of sin. Death and suffering came as a result of sin (Rom. 5:12).
2. This was fulfilled at the cross. Christ carried sin and all its consequences up Calvary's hill that day. The weight of the cross on His back was symbolic of the weight of all our sin, our sorrow and brokenness because of sin.

### **III. THE SUBSTITUTION OF THE SERVANT (VS. 5-6)**

Put simply, by substitution we mean Christ took our place. We deserve death and eternal punishment for our sins but Christ died in our place, taking the wrath of God against sin upon Himself so we could go free.

#### **A. The Necessity of Substitution (Vs. 5-6)**

Our need for Christ's substitutionary death is because of our **sin**. The sinfulness of man is in clear view in this prophecy. The word 'sin' is mentioned twice (Vs. 10 & 12) which contains the basic idea of guilt. Our sinfulness is not only declared, it is defined in detail so we understand exactly what sin is.

1. Sin is transgression – "our transgressions" (Vs. 5a); "the transgression of my people" (Vs. 8). To transgress is to break God's law (1 John 3:4). Note they are plural in number (transgressionss). It is not that we have broken God's law once or twice. We have broken it repeatedly. We have shattered God's perfect standard.
2. Sin is iniquity – "bruised for our iniquities" (Vs. 5b); "the iniquity of us all" (Vs. 6b). The word has the idea of 'perversity'. "It refers to the evil of our fallen nature and the evil of our sinful acts (Psalm 51:5). Iniquity is first of all a description of the corrupt condition of man's heart. Then, iniquity refers to the sinful deeds that we commit and how evil they are in God's eyes." (Cloud)
3. Sin is wandering astray (Vs. 6a) – "All we like sheep have gone astray". Our first parents went astray when they sinned in the Garden of Eden and as a result, the whole human race has gone

astray. Like a sheep that foolishly wanders away from the shepherd, we have wandered away from Christ, the Good Shepherd. Psalm 58:3 “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go **astray** as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” Psalm 119:176 “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.”

4. Sin is willfully going our own way (Vs. 6b) – “we have turned every one to his own way”. This is more than just wandering in sin. This is a deliberate choice to go our own sinful way. The world encourages this sin as if it was the right thing to do. “You do you” they say! “Go and find yourself!” “Be whatever you want to be!” “Live your best life!” “If it feels good go ahead and do it!” “Do whatever you want in life!” Proverbs warns “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12, 16:25). Our own way is the broad way Christ warned of that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13). Your own way ends in hell fire. It is that serious! Choose the narrow way of salvation in Christ before it’s too late. Illustration: It is like a driver cruising along a road. All seems smooth. All seems perfect. But he doesn’t realize that up ahead the bridge has been washed out and he is about to plunge over the precipice to destruction.

**B. The Price of our Substitution (Vs. 5-6, 8, 10, 11-12)**

Look at the price the Lord Jesus Christ paid when He took our place.

1. Wounded for our transgressions (Vs. 5a). “The Hebrew term for ‘wounded’ (chalal) means “to pierce” or “to bore”. The servant would be pierced.” (Fruchtenbaum)
  - a. His head was pierced with the cruel crown of thorns. Christ bore the curse of sin as his diadem (Gen. 3:17-18).
  - b. His hands and feet were pierced by the **7-inch (17cm)** Roman spikes. **Think of those precious hands** – strong hands, masculine hands, pure hands, loving hands, compassionate hands, healing hands, serving hands, the Son of God’s hands. **Think of those precious feet** – beautiful feet, serving feet, sinless feet, sacred feet. I see my hand gripping the mallet that day and my sins driving those awful spikes through Christ’s sinless hands and feet.
  - c. His side was pierced by the Roman spear and blood and water flowed out, evidence of a ruptured heart. Not only was our Saviour’s body broken at the cross, His heart was broken over our sin.
2. Bruised for our iniquities (Vs. 5b) The Hebrew word for “bruised” (daka) means “to crush.” (Fruchtenbaum)
  - a. Crushed in the Garden of Gethsemane under the weight of our sin. The word ‘Gethsemane’ literally means “oil press” as it was

here that the olives that grew in this area had been pressed according to the ancient methods.

- b. Christ's agony in the garden is described the Gospel writers as follows: "sorrowful and very heavy" (Matt. 26:37); "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Vs. 38); "sore amazed and very heavy" (Mark 14:33). **His soul was heavy under the crushing weight of our sins.**
3. Chastened for our peace (Vs. 5c)
    - a. The Hebrew term for 'peace, *shalom*, refers to the spiritual peace of those who believe. The punishment that leads to this type of peace would be placed upon the Servant, for His suffering would be necessary to bring about 'shalom' (peace).
    - b. Col. 1:20-21 "And, having made **peace through the blood of his cross**, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven. **And you**, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled."
  4. Scourged for our healing (Vs. 5d)
    - a. The word 'healed' means "to mend, cure". Healing for our broken, sin diseased lives was paid for by Messiah's sufferings. The Hebrew term for "stripes" refers to welts and swellings of the skin due to beatings or flogging. The same word is translated 'hurt' (Gen. 4:23), "stripe for stripe" (Ex. 21:25), 'wounds' (Ps. 38:5), 'blueness of a wound' (Prov. 20:30), 'bruises' (Is. 1:6). Israel's healing would be affected by the Servant's suffering.
    - b. "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him" (Jn. 19:1). We believe this took place in the Antonia Fortress that stood at the Northern end of the Temple Mount.
    - c. "The scourge consisted of a handle to which several leather thongs were affixed. These were weighted on the ends with jagged pieces of bone and metal. This would help tear the flesh and make each blow more effective. The victim was stripped, and usually tied to a post with his hands also bound so as not to be able to defend himself. The blows were normally applied to the back and loins, but sometimes to the whole body. According to Jewish law, a man could receive no more than forty stripes (Deut. 24:3). With the Romans, however, no such limitation was observed; it depended entirely upon the commander in charge. The implication of the text is that Jesus Christ received a Roman scourging, and it was by no means limited to 39 stripes."<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 52:14 "As many were astonished at

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Lawrence

thee; **his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:**"

5. Laden with all our iniquities (Vs. 6b, 11, 12)
  - a. What was laid upon Christ – "and the LORD hath **laid on him** the iniquity of us all" (6b), "for he shall **bear** their iniquities" (Vs. 11), "he **bare** the sin of many" (Vs. 12). Think of it! The sins of the entire human race were placed upon the Son of God that day. Personalize it. **My sin** was laid on Christ that day.
  - b. Who laid our sin on Christ – "**the LORD** hath laid on him the iniquity of us all". Sinful men did not place our sins on Christ. God the Father laid our sins upon His Eternal, Sinless Son. As Abraham laid the wood on his only son Isaac as they ascended Mount Moriah (Gen. 22), so God the Father laid the cross upon His Only Begotten Son that day. We see the Roman soldiers put the cross on Christ's back but in reality, it was the unseen hands of the Father that put the cross upon Christ that day.
  - c. Imagine what that would have been like for the pure Son of God. He knew all things. Imagine how it must have felt for Him as the Father placed our sin upon Him that day. Isaiah 53 gives us the Divine perspective of the cross. It was God's doing, not mans.
6. Stricken for the transgression of His people (Vs. 8) The word 'stricken' refers to a blow. It means to strike. We broke God's law (transgressed) and Christ took the blow for us that we deserved.
7. Put to death – "cut off out of the land of the living" (Vs. 8) Daniel 9:26 also prophesied that Messiah would be "cut off, but not for himself." The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Christ tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9). Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3). Christ demonstrated His love when he died for us (Rom. 5:8)
8. Made an offering for sin (Vs. 10)

#### **IV. THE SUBMISSION OF THE SERVANT (VS. 7-8)**

We see the total submission of the Son of God to the Father's plan. How thankful we should be that Christ was totally surrendered to the will of God. This total surrender is seen in Messiah's:

##### **A. Surrendered to His Sufferings (Vs. 7a, 8a)**

1. The **silence of Christ** in the face of His sufferings is evidence of His perfect surrender. This was literally fulfilled in the trial of Christ. Pilot marveled at Christ's silence in the face of accusation (Mk. 15:5).
2. 1 Peter 2:21-24 "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow

his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”

3. Christ was surrendered in His arrest and trial – “taken from prison and from judgment”. The word ‘prison’ comes from the Hebrew word that has the sense of ‘restraint’ or ‘coercion’. The Hebrew term for “judgment” (mishpat) refers to a judicial judgment, meaning the act of deciding a case in a trial and the litigation before judges. Hence, Isaiah predicted that the Servant would be taken away from prison to undergo a judicial judgment. (Fruchtenbaum)

#### **B. Surrendered to His Slaying (Vs. 7b, 8b)**

1. Christ was brought as a lamb to the slaughter. He submitted silently to the cross. The reference to the ‘lamb’ here is a precious reminder of the fact that Christ is the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).
2. **Four soldiers** were assigned the task of crucifying Christ (John 19:23). No doubt the number was in part due to the expected struggle with the victim. But Christ laid down His life willingly.
3. John 10:18 “No man taketh it from me, but **I lay it down of myself**. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

### **V. THE SINLESSNESS OF THE SERVANT (VS. 9)**

The perfect sinlessness of Jehovah’s servant is declared in this verse.

#### **A. Christ committed no outward sin** – “he had done no violence”.

1. Isaiah 42:2 “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.”
2. Christ is described as “holy, harmless, undefiled” in Hebrews 7:26.
3. Christ was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin (Heb. 4:15)

#### **B. Christ had no inward sin** – “neither was any deceit in his mouth”.

1. The words that come out of our mouths reveal what’s in our hearts (Matt. 12:34). Christ had no deceit in his mouth because His heart was totally sinless.
2. In Christ is no sin – “...in him is **no sin**.” (1 John 3:5)
3. Christ is the Lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:19).
4. 2 Cor. 5:21 “For he hath **made him to be sin for us**, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

5. **Not only did Christ do no sin (1 Pet. 2:22), He knew no sin (1 Cor. 5:21) and in Him is no sin (1 John 3:5).**

## **VI. THE SATISFACTION IN THE SERVANT (Vs. 10-11)**

### **A. The Father's Determination (Vs. 10)**

1. The cross was according to God's sovereign will – “yet it **pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin...**” The final three verses of this prophecy (Vs. 10-12) emphasis the inner sufferings of Christ. The ‘soul’ is mentioned three times – “when thou shalt make his **soul** an offering for sin” (Vs. 10), “He shall see of the travail of his **soul**” (Vs. 11) & “he hath poured out his **soul** unto death” (Vs. 12). Christ suffered in His whole person – Spirit, Soul and Body.
2. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is to say, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**” (Matt. 27:46; Psalm 22:1) Sin's punishment is eternal separation from God (2. Thess. 1:9). Christ endured the wrath of God on our behalf and was forsaken by the Father at the cross. From all eternity past, the Father, Son and Spirit had enjoyed close and intimate communion but now Christ is left alone.
3. Ironside: “His cry of loneliness is the key to the deeper suffering of those hours when God, the righteous Judge, had to abandon Him to the inward spiritual suffering as Surety for sinners. It was then that His soul – not merely His body – was made an offering for sin...It was not His physical sufferings alone that made propitiation for sin, but what He endured in His inmost being when His holy, spotless soul became the great Sin Offering. In other words, it was not what man did to Him that made reconciliation for iniquity, but what He endured at the hand of God, leading to Immanuel's orphaned cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”
4. The following poem expresses the truth well:

Jehovah lifted up His rod;  
O Christ, it fell on Thee!  
Thou wast sore stricken of thy God –  
There's not one stroke for me.  
Thy tears, thy blood, beneath it flowed;  
Thy bruising healeth me. (A.R. Cousin)

### **B. The Father's satisfaction (Vs. 11)**

1. The Father saw the Son's travail on the cross and was perfectly and fully satisfied in the sufficiency of the sacrifice that was made for sin. The Father is **ONLY** satisfied in the sacrifice of His Son for



our sin, not our works or religion. Nothing else could satisfy God's righteous demands of a Holy God.

2. Christ, in a loud voice, shouted "FINISHED" (Compare Matt. 27:50, Mk. 15:37, Luke 24:36 & John 19:30)
3. "It is finished" = (τετέλεσται) "Word was used in Greek commercial life. The term signified the completion of a transaction by the full payment of a price or the discharge of a debt by a completed payment."<sup>2</sup>
4. Christ paid my sin debt in full! We can add NOTHING to His perfect, complete sacrifice. (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:3-7)

### **Conclusion:**

1. Hebrews 2:3 "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation..." Will you receive God's offer of salvation through Christ this Easter?
2. Christian, are you worshipful and thankful this Easter? Will you proclaim the Gospel to others or are you ashamed (Rom. 1:16)? Will you surrender your life completely to the Father's will?

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<sup>2</sup> Pentecost