

The Servant: The Servant Sacrificed

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

By [David Strain](#)

November 16, 2014

If you would now take your own copies of the Scriptures or turn with me in one of the church Bibles. If you're using a church Bible, page 613. We're reading Isaiah 52 at verse 13 through the end of the fifty-third chapter. Isaiah 52 verse 13. Before we read, would you bow your heads with me as we pray together?

Lord Jesus, You embraced the nails and the thorns and the mocking and the lashes and the cross and the fury and wrath of a holy God for us. Would You now send us the Holy Spirit as we meditate together on Your self-giving love that we might be brought anew to Golgotha, to Calvary, and there to see what You have done, to be broken anew and grieved over the sin that nailed You to the tree, to be melted in wonder, love, and praise that we who were still sinners should receive such demonstration of the Father's love for us that You would die for us? So work, we now pray, by Your Word in our hearts. For we ask it in Your name, amen.

Isaiah 52 at the thirteenth verse. This is the Word of Almighty God:

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; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon 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 – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Amen, and we give thanks to God that He has spoken in His holy Word.

The Servant Scorned

We continue our exposition of the great song of the Suffering Servant that we've just read together and we've come tonight to the central section of the song in verses 4 to 6 of chapter 53; Isaiah 53, verses 4 to 6. There are two blocks of text that precede it and two that follow it so that verses 4 to 6 are literarily as well as theologically the very heart of this amazing chapter, this amazing passage, which is a fact that really ought to raise our expectations that these verses will contain truths of unusual gravity and glory, truths that none of us can afford to miss. You will remember that when we first looked at this passage in Isaiah 52:13-15, the prophet focused our attention on the triumph of Jesus Christ; Isaiah 52:13-15. He was telling us there about the Servant's success, the Servant's success. And then last time we looked at 53:1-3 and noticed there that there was a dramatic change of tone and emphasis. The speaker in the opening three verses of chapter 53 is no longer God the Father, exalting in the success of His Servant. Now it is rather the grieving prophet, Isaiah, himself here in distress over the unbelief of the world. "Who has believed our report?" was his plaintiff cry. And so there we were led to consider the Servant scorned, the Servant scorned.

The Servant Sacrificed

And now in verses 4 to 6 of chapter 53 there is yet another change of emphasis and theme. Once again we meet Christ, the object of human derision and terrible suffering but this time we are led to see the real significance of the torment through which He passed. Here is the Servant sacrificed, the Servant sacrificed. In 1 to 3 of this chapter, Isaiah showed us the world's perspective on Jesus Christ – it rejects Him, remember, because of His weakness, His origins, His appearance. He does not conform, by any metric you might care to use, to worldly expectations of an effective Savior and of a reigning King. But as we'll see in our passage this evening, the world's perspective is horribly, tragically wrong. Here we are brought, in verses 4 to 6, to a new vantage point, helped to understand here the real meaning of the Suffering Servant and of the cross that He bore. And something of the gravity and the enormity of the truths that we will see here is conveyed by the word with which verse 4 begins.

Would you look at it please? Verse 4 – “Surely he has borne our griefs.” Surely – there's an element of surprise here. “Surely he has borne our griefs.” It is an exclamation. There is an emphatic note of affirmation from the lips of one who used to think differently about the Servant of the Lord. “We esteemed him not,” he says, “but now I see the truth.” This is not a cold, calculated statement of doctrine. This is a word of wonder and amazement. And that has to be part of the agenda for our time together in the Scriptures this evening as we study this passage. It needs to be our goal to ignite for the first time or to rekindle or to fan back into flame our wonder at the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We are being invited in to stand beside the prophet on the slopes of Golgotha in holy awe at the great transaction taking place at the cross. Surely this is what is really going on. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. It is a call to penitence and praise, to confession and consecration, to come back together once again tonight to Calvary; not to analyze and scrutinize, but to bow down and to adore the Man who was hung upon the tree.

Sacrifice: Theology that leads to Doxology

Having said all of that, Isaiah really does help us get our theology of the cross right here. This is an intensely theological passage, verses 4 to 6, so he wants us to see how theology leads to doxology, how doctrine and adoration fit together and flow into one another. He models for us in these verses the link between profundity and praise. He doesn't think to dumb down the doctrine of the cross in an attempt to generate strong emotion and deep devotion in our hearts. On the contrary, he actually gives us, as we will see, a precise clear outline of the meaning of what happened to Jesus of Nazareth when He was nailed to that Roman cross. Theologians, you may know, theologians typically use three terms in combination to explain the meaning of the cross. First they say the cross is substitutionary in nature. Jesus is our substitute. Secondly, they say the cross is

penal in character; that is, He is bearing our penalty on the cross. And thirdly, it is an atonement; that is, it is a sacrifice that settles the wrath of God and satisfies divine justice. And if you look at verses 4 to 6 you will see that each verse corresponds to one element of that classic definition of the cross. It is substitutionary, verse 4; it is penal, verse 5, and it is an atonement, verse 6. If we are going to fuel praise and adoration, penitence and consecration, we need to understand more of the depths of the cross. We don't need to skim its surface; we must plunge into its depths. And verses 4 to 6 help us with that.

I. The Cross: Substitutionary in Nature

So would you look at verse 4 with me first of all? Christ's cross, we learn here, was substitutionary in nature. That is the note that so moves Isaiah. In verses 1 to 3, he had been reflecting on the ways in which he once joined the world in despising and rejecting the Servant of the Lord, esteeming Him not, thinking Him nothing, worthless. But now, he says, he knows better. What was really happening at Calvary? "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." While he esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, at that very same moment the Servant was willingly, deliberately, taking upon Himself the misery of sin's curse. Deuteronomy 21:23 declares that everyone who is hanged upon a tree is cursed by God. And looking at the wretched figure of Christ, nailed between two common criminals outside the city walls, the conclusion of every spectator could only be that God had indeed deserted Him and condemned Him, stricken by God and afflicted. And so He had. But not for any sin of His own. God had cursed Him. He was indeed stricken and afflicted and smitten by God, with grief and sorrow at the cross, but it wasn't because of any sin of His. No, Isaiah tells us it was our griefs and our sorrows that He bore. The verbs Isaiah uses there are important. "He has borne our griefs". The word means "to lift up off someone else; to bear the weight instead of them." He carried our sorrows, literally, "He shouldered our sorrows." The yoke, the crushing weight of them, He bore for us, pressing down upon Him that you might be lifted up and relieved of them. We could not bear it and He shoulders the burden alone, carrying its full weight for us.

Think of Jesus on the night of His betrayal. He comes to Gethsemane with His disciples to seek solitude, to pray and prepare Himself for the ordeal of the cross into which He was about to descend. Mark 14:33 tells us "He began to be greatly distressed and troubled and He said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.'" And when He prayed, do you remember His request? "Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me, yet not what I will but what You will." There was a terrible weight pressing down upon Him, an awful burden crushing Him. It wasn't His burden; it was your burden and my burden, lifted from your shoulders and placed upon His. He who knew no sin was being made sin for us. He who was rich became poor that through His poverty we might become rich. That's what's happening here. There is a great act of substitution. The

misery and grief our sin incurs falls on Him.

II. The Cross: Penal in Character

Then look at verse 5, in the second place. If Jesus' sufferings and cross were substitutionary, they were also penal. He takes our place; He bears our penalty. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Whose faults necessitated the cross? Not Christ's faults; my faults! Your faults! Our transgressions wounded Him. The word is "pierced, punctured with a mortal wound." That's what it means. My sin, more than Roman nails, dealt Him the death blow. You may know the painting by Rembrandt, "The Raising of the Cross." I'm not at all in favor of pictorial images and representations of Jesus, but there's a profound truth in Rembrandt's painting, "The Raising of the Cross." If you were to look at it you would see the cross being hoisted into place. In the background there is a priest. Around him are mocking crowds and grieving women. Hoisting the cross are Roman soldiers. But at the feet of the figure who is intended to represent Jesus, helping to raise the cross into its stand, is an out of place figure wearing a blue painter's hat. It is Rembrandt himself, raising the cross, dropping it into its stand. He has painted himself into the scene as one of those who crucified the Lord. You get the message? As the old spiritual asks us, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" What's the answer? What does Rembrandt say? "Yes, we were there. It was our sin that He bore. Surely as though we had wielded the hammer that drove the nails into His flesh ourselves, we crucified the Lord." And notice in the text the reason He was wounded, when it was our transgressions that deserved the wounding. Why was He crushed on account of our iniquities? Verse 5 again, "Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed." He was chastised. That is to say He was punished. There was a penalty for sin and He took it all. That's why He was wounded and crushed. The penalty your disobedience demands fell on Jesus Christ. Peace is what we get. The horror of hell is what He endured. Healing is what He purchased. The terrible stripes of the Roman whip, marking His flesh, is what He bore. Peace here is the undoing of our alienation from God, healing the undoing of our fragmentation and dysfunction. But His laceration was the cost of our wholeness. His emersion beneath divine wrath was the fee of our reconciliation to God. "What thou my Lord hast suffered was all for sinners' gain. Mine, mine was the transgress but thine the deadly pain. Lo, here I fall my Savior. Tis I deserve thy place. Look on me with thy favor, and vouchsafe to me thy grace." The cross was substitutionary. It was penal; He bore our penalty.

III. The Cross: An Atonement

And then finally, verse 6, Christ's cross was atoning. Verse 6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord

has laid upon him the iniquity of us all.” The contrast between Christ’s suffering and our rejection of Him that we saw in verse 4 is mirrored again here in verse 6. We are like sheep, Isaiah says. My wife grew up in a very small village on the north coast of the Highlands of Scotland, the northwest Highlands of Scotland. And in the bay beneath the village there are a group of small islands, the Summer Isles they’re called. And her father and uncle every season would graze their sheep on those islands. They would load them into their fishing boats and rather than land the fishing boats, once they got close enough they’d simply throw the sheep over the side. You have to get close enough to give the sheep a chance, otherwise their wool is saturated and they just sink! They don’t make it! But they would try to get close to the islands and then throw the sheep over the side, they’d swim ashore, and the reason they did that of course is because sheep love to wander; they go astray. That’s what sheep do. There’s nowhere for them to get lost on those little islands.

We are like sheep, Isaiah says. We wander, every one of us. And it’s not just that we’re following the flock; it’s not that peer pressure and the effect of the crowd has swept us along. Not at all. Look what he says. “We have turned – every one – to his own way.” Every one to his own way. That is the essence of sin, you know – rebellion, independence, the claim to self-sufficiency. We know best. We’re in control. We turn – every one of us – to our own ways so that we are utterly, hopelessly, lost. Lost. Understand that is your condition tonight if you are not a Christian. You are lost and you cannot hope to find your way home alone. You’ve gone astray.

But there is good news. God has acted. “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” We’ve seen this before when we considered verse 15 of Isaiah 52. Not far from the prophet’s mind is Leviticus 16 and the language of the ritual of the Day of Atonement when the high priest would take a goat and lay his hands on its head and confess over it all the sins of the community. And then they’d send it out into the desert symbolically, carrying away the guilt of the people with it. Another goat was taken into the temple and then sacrificed; its blood shed to atone for sin. And Jesus Christ here fulfills the symbolism of both. He is the scapegoat upon whom the Father, in the role of High Priest, lays our iniquity. “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all,” and He is the sacrificial victim whose blood atones for every one of His people. The Servant is our substitute, the Servant bears our penalty, the Servant atones for our sin.

Application

And as we close, I want to highlight with you three ways to use these precious truths. First, they provide us with Gospel motivation, secondly, they give us help in the work of Gospel proclamation, and finally, they should generate in all of us Gospel adoration. Gospel motivation, Gospel proclamation, and Gospel adoration.

Gospel Motivation

First, they provide us with Gospel motivation. Here is the sinfulness of the sin festering in our redeemed hearts. Look at the language the prophet uses. “Grief, sorrow, stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, crushed, chastised, lacerated” – why? Why does Jesus willingly shoulder this awful burden as verse 4 says He does? Why does the Lord make Him bear it as verse 6 says He does? It was to bring us peace and win our healing, achieve our pardon, atone for our sin. So here then is the enormity of sin, paid for in the wounds of body and soul that pierced our Savior. Here’s what those daily peccadilloes that we smile at and shrug off cost. Think about it. This is what Isaiah is really telling us. It was our prayerlessness that nailed Him to the tree. It was our neglect of the Bible that crushed Him. That grudge that you have nursed crucified Christ. The lies that you tell pierced His hands and feet. The chastisement for your porn addiction was upon Him. The lashes that striped His back were made by your drunkenness. It was our lust, our pride, our anger, our gluttony, our laziness, our avarice that demanded satisfaction in His blood. Is it possible for any Christian to read this text and not feel in their hearts revulsion at every sin they still find festering there that would necessitate Calvary? Is it possible to read our passage and not long, not long to be holier, more faithful to the Savior who died for me? The credibility of your every excuse for the cosmic treason of your sin evaporates and the categorical imperative of personal holiness shines more brightly under the glaring light of the cross. Here’s Gospel motivation. Hate sin; hate it! You see what it cost to deal with it and you toy with it and play with it as though it were nothing! Hate your sin! It cost the lifeblood of your Savior. And live to please the One who, in love for you, gave all to make you His. Gospel motivation.

Gospel Proclamation

The passage also helps us with Gospel proclamation, doesn’t it? Brothers and sisters, how badly we need to get this right. The great benefit of the Christian Gospel is not a better you, psychologically, whole and happy and healthy. The good news is not that Jesus can straighten out your relationships. It is not, “Come to Jesus and He’ll make you a better dad.” It’s not, “Come to Christ and be the you, you always wanted to be.” Our message is this - “All we like sheep have gone astray and turned - every one of us - to our own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Our message is that, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.” Sin kills and destroys and condemns and only Jesus saves. That’s what we have to offer. That is our message. Please let’s never confuse the side-effects of the Gospel with the Gospel itself. Please let’s never make ancillary benefits that often accompany the cleansing effects of the blood of Christ washing our consciences clean with the Gospel benefits themselves. The message we have for you tonight is bigger and better than emotional wellbeing and relational satisfaction. You can find those things elsewhere. The message we have for you is so much better. God was in Christ

reconciling the world to Himself. Jesus can make you clean. He can make you clean. He can reconcile you to God. The cosmic problem, the greatest need of your heart is forgiveness of sin, and there's only one fountain that can wash your sin away, only one place to come and wash and be clean - in the wounds of Jesus Christ. That's our message and our text tonight aims to help us get it right and keep it clear. It helps us with Gospel proclamation.

Gospel Adoration

And then finally this passage should generate and inspire Gospel adoration. Whose heart is not melted in love for Jesus as they read these lines? "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace. The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Here is the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Christ for your soul. Here is love, vast as the ocean, lovingkindness as the flood. When the Prince of Life our ransom shed for us His precious blood, who His love will not remember? Who can cease to sing His praise? He can never be forgotten throughout heaven's eternal days?" Who can cease to sing His praise seeing what has been done for us? He died that you might live. There is no devotion too extravagant, there is no service too profound. We will never exhaust the infinite worth of His self-giving love. It is the Lamb standing in the midst of the throne in Revelation chapter 5 looking as though it had been slain. It is the wounds of Christ, yet visible above, in beauty glorified, that fuels the praises of the elders and the angels and of all creation. That is the message of our text, in other words, that generates worship in heaven, that fuels it forever. Here's the great reason to sing and to serve, to worship and to witness and to work for the Savior's glory. Here's the foundation of a life of selfless devotion to the honor of the name of Jesus. "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all." The Christ who was our substitute, who bore our penalty, who made atonement, provides Gospel motivation to hate our sin and live for His glory, becomes the subject and matter of Gospel proclamation - He can make us clean. Go tell all the world there is a Savior for them in Jesus - and should fuel Gospel adoration forever. Have you found your heart growing cold, your praises lifeless and dull? Take Isaiah 53 home and bow at the foot of the cross again and see if your heart will not melt anew and the fires of praise and adoration and love for Jesus to not begin to burn brightly under the glare of Calvary. May the Lord bless to you the ministry of His holy Word. Shall we pray together?

Our Father, we praise You for Jesus who gave all for us. O, have mercy on us that we are so reluctant to give our all for Him. We would tear every sin that drives You from us from its place in our hearts, and there tonight anew, or perhaps for the very first time, we would set apart Christ as Lord. Give us Your Spirit's aid in that great work. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).