

## **The Servant: The Servant Succeeds**

**Isaiah 52:13–53:12**

**By David Strain**

*November 2, 2014*

Now if you would please take your own copy of God's Word or turn in one of the church Bibles to the prophecy according to Isaiah chapter 52 at verse 13. You'll find that on page 613 in the church Bibles; Isaiah 52 at verse 13. Before we read, let's bow our heads and ask for God's help as we pray. Let us pray.

*Our Father, Your Word tells us that we are to look to Christ and be saved. "Look to me all ye ends of the earth and be saved." Salvation comes from looking in faith to Jesus. Your Word tells us that we are to look to Christ for sanctification, for victory over sin. We all, with unveiled faces, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. We are changed as we behold the glory of God in the face of Christ. And Your Word tells us that we are to look to Christ for perseverance and endurance. Looking unto Jesus we run our races with perseverance. Looking unto Jesus who endured such opposition from sinful men, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame. We, looking unto Jesus, are enabled to persevere and so we pray tonight as we being a season of looking to Christ in this magnificent portion of Your Word that You would call some of us who do not know Him from darkness to life that we would look to Christ for salvation, that You would call all of us on to new obedience and empower us as we behold Your glory in this portion of Your Word that You would give us grace to gain victory over besetting sin. And that You would work by this portion of Your Word in enabling us to continue to run our races looking unto Jesus. Would You do that now please as we read and as we hear Your Word proclaimed? In Jesus' name, amen.*

Isaiah 52 at verse 13. 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 pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds 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 praise God that He has spoken in His holy and inerrant Word.

### **The Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah**

Tonight we are beginning a new five part series looking at the portion of Scripture we're just read together - Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12. And I want to say that as we give our attention to the text, I can't help but feel its gravity and its weight to sense that if ever there was a passage suited to the melting of our hearts with praise to God at the wonder of His love and grace then surely it's this one. So I'm coming to these expositions with a sense of moment and expectation believing that God intends to do some important work by His Word in our hearts and in our lives as we sit together in these weeks under the shadow of the cross. These verses are of course the great climactic installment of what has been called "The Servant Songs" that weave like a golden thread throughout Isaiah's prophecy, each of them pointing forward in a different way to the coming Deliverer of God's people,

the Lord Jesus Christ. That is never clearer, of course, than in the final song that is now before us. It speaks to us, doesn't it, in unmistakable detail of the horrific ordeal and the glorious achievement of Jesus Christ at the cross on behalf of sinful men and women in every age and every place.

The song, if you'll allow me a few moments for an overview, the song follows a five part structure. Would you look at it with me? In 52:13-15 the song begins by focusing our attention on the servant's success. The servant's success. Then 53:1-3 the servant scorned. The servant scorned. Then 4-6, the servant sacrificed. Then 6-9, the servant stricken. And finally 10-12, the servant satisfied. The servant succeeds, the servant scorned, the servant sacrificed, the servant stricken, and the servant satisfied. That is the outline of the passage; that's where we'll be going over these weeks together.

### **Fixing our Gaze on Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King**

And tonight we're turning our attention to 52:13-15 - the servant succeeds. And it's a passage that opens, notice, with a word of exhortation, a command. "Behold, my servant." It is a striking beginning. It's not a gentle invitation to cast a casual glance in Jesus' direction. It is an authoritative summons to give all our attention, to fix our eyes, to rivet our gaze upon the servant of the Lord. Notice the speaker here. Who is talking? It is not the prophet. In this verse the speaker is God the Father Himself. Here, the Father preaches Jesus Christ, His Son. Almighty God proclaims His servant to the world and calls us to turn our minds in these moments from every other object and to fix them on Jesus.

Do you remember when you first got behind the wheel of a car and began to learn to drive? It felt like there were so many things you had to concentrate on all at once that you'd never get the hang of it, didn't it, in those moments. One very important, one very common, rather, rookie mistake that many people make is to look at your hands on the steering wheel or perhaps to look at the road immediately in front of you. And then when you finally look up and see what's going and where you're going you over compensate and the car veers all over the road. We had to learn, didn't we, to look where we wanted to go and not at our hands on the wheel and not at the road immediately before us. But to look ahead where we wanted to go you steer the car where you're looking. That's the force and effect of this opening exhortation. Too many of us are all over the road - erratic and irregular and dangerous because we're looking in all the wrong places. Like a novice behind the wheel of a car, too busy looking at the steering wheel or the road before us, we flood our gaze, don't we, with self and circumstance. "Look up!" our text is saying. Look to Christ. "Behold my servant," God is saying to you. That is where you need to be looking. Like a car on the road your life will go where your gaze points it. Your life will go where your gaze points it.

So God is talking in our text, God is talking to you whether tonight you're a Christian or not, God the Father is the speaker and He is pointing us to Jesus Christ. "Behold, my servant." Look here. Here's your destination. Here's what matters. Here's who you really need. Look to Christ. "O soul are you wearied and troubled, no light in the darkness you see? There's light for a look at the Savior and life more abundant and free. Turn your eyes upon Jesus." That's the Word of God for us here that in many ways really is the goal of this entire extended passage, the whole servant's song, to rivet our attention on Jesus Christ, His glorious victory, His self-giving love at Calvary. Your life will follow your gaze, so look at My servant. Behold My servant. Make Christ your great study. You can never hope to be like Him, Christian, if you will not make Him your study. You can never hope for salvation if you're not a Christian till you look to Christ alone to give it to you. You must look to Christ.

And in verses 13 to 15 of Isaiah 52 there are three facts about the work of Christ that are highlighted for us as reasons to look to Him, three glories to behold in particular in God's servant, three motives to direct our gaze to Him and never again to look away. First in verse 13 we see the servant's kingly reign, the servant's kingly reign. Then in the second half - sorry, then secondly in verses 14 to the first half of verse 15, the servant's priestly sacrifice, the servant's priestly sacrifice. And then in the remainder of verse 15 the servant's prophetic words. It is the classic comprehensive summary of Jesus' work as God's servant, our King, our Priest, our Prophet. There is nothing left undone. If I can use an American sporting idiom and you can tell me if I used it correctly later, there are no bases that Jesus' work does not cover. He is a comprehensive Savior, able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him. There is no lack in Jesus Christ, no need in you He cannot address. No sin so ever black He cannot make it clean, no darkness His light cannot penetrate. "Behold my servant - your perfect, comprehensive Savior, your Prophet, Priest, and King."

## **I. The Servant's Kingly Reign**

Let's think about the first thing then that God wants us to see in His servant. Verse 13 - "Behold my servant," God says, because of His kingly reign. His kingly reign. "Behold my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted." That word "wisely" - "Behold my servant shall act wisely" - that word is important here. In Hebrew it means, "more than the wisdom to conceive of a course of action carefully." It also involves the prosperity and the fruitfulness and the success that wise course of action can result in. David Clines, one Old Testament scholar, translates the first line of verse 13, "See my servant, his wisdom prospers." In this fourth servant's song the theme of suffering, terrible and bleak is going to dominate. Like a storm cloud it is going to blot out the light and we'll be in the shadow, under the shadow of affliction for a great deal of the time as we work through its message. But that is not where we start; we start not with the sufferings of Christ but with the success of Christ's work. God here

declares to us the victory of His Son. His work will not fail. His purposes will be realized. His mission will be accomplished. As Jesus Himself would pray to His Father thinking about His disciples, "I have kept them in Your name which You have given to Me. I have guarded them and not one of them is lost" - John 17:12. Jesus accomplishes His Father's plan. "The work, Father, that You have given to Me, I have finished." None are lost. "Behold, my servant shall act wisely." My servant shall prosper. He shall succeed.

How we need to be reminded, I think, of this truth in these days. My servant shall prosper; He will succeed. Jesus' cause is not currently in trouble. Do you believe that? His agenda has not been derailed. His program for the evangelization of the world is not in retreat. No matter what Islamic extremism or secular liberalism does, it is as though God were taking us in hand here in our discouragement and in our fear and reminding us of truth that we are in danger of forgetting. "Behold, my servant shall prosper." He shall succeed. He will be victorious. "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Do notice the three phrases in the remainder of verse 13 that describe for us the contours of Christ's success. He shall be high, or raised. He shall be lifted up; He shall be exalted. "The three-fold exaltation expresses a dignity beyond what any other merits or receives," writes Alec Motyer. "It is surely intended," he says, "as a clue leading to the identity of the servant. It is impossible not to be reminded of the resurrection, ascension, and heavenly exaltedness of the Lord Jesus." Here's the far side of Calvary, the empty tomb. He shall be raised, the ascension. He shall be lifted up, the heavenly session at the Father's right hand. He shall be exalted. Here is Jesus, given the name that is above every name, before which every knee must bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The servant's kingly reign. Jesus reigns. He is on the throne. He is exalted and He governs His church and fulfills the design and purpose of the Father. Do not be discouraged nor lose sight of the victory and reign of your king but in the confidence of His victory labor on for His glory. The servant's kingly reign.

## **II. The Servant's Priestly Sacrifice**

Then verse 14, secondly, the servant's priestly sacrifice. The servant's priestly sacrifice. The verse opens, doesn't it, with a surprise. If verse 13 paints a picture of a victorious, exalted king, verse 14 really offers a jarring contrast. "Many were astonished at you." The word is appalled. He is abhorrent. Many are caused to take a step back in revulsion at Him. Why? What could possibly warrant such behavior when the one to whom these people are reacting would be so exalted and rewarded and honored by God Himself? Look at the text. What does it say? "His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind." The King who would be exalted would first be marred, disfigured, brutalized, dehumanized, ruined. He would be, our text says, unrecognizable as a human being - "beyond human semblance." "What is that?"

That's what they would say when they came within sight of the cross and saw the torn, quivering flesh hanging there. "What is that? Is that a person? Is that a man?" Here is Jesus Christ, God's Son, His servant. This is His work. This is what His wise and prudent action would entail for Him. This is what He chose and purposed and designed. This is the work that prospers. Here He is reduced from a man to a thing, to an it rather than a who. "Behold, my servant shall act wisely," God said. "He shall prosper." But what wisdom could possibly demand this? How is this serving God?

The first part of verse 15 explains, doesn't it? Here's why He does what He does and endures what He endures. "So shall he sprinkle many nations." The first part of verse 14, "as many were astonished at you," is being interrupted by a description of Christ's terrible sufferings. They are parenthetical. They are an explanatory aside. The sentence begun in verse 14, "as many are astonished at you," is now completed in the first line of verse 15. "So shall he sprinkle many nations." Many are horrified by Jesus. That is their response to Him. But look at His response to them. "He shall sprinkle many nations." What is it that is taking place at the cross as the Lord Jesus Christ was tortured and scourged and beaten and nailed to the tree? What is going on? It is the work of a priest. "He shall sprinkle many nations" - that's sacrificial language, atonement language drawn from the rites of Old Testament temple worship. Think particularly here of Leviticus 16, a text to which we will have cause to return in the days ahead. The Day of Atonement when the high priest would take some of the blood of a goat and sprinkle it on the altar to make atonement for the sin of the people. That is what is happening at the cross. That is why the servant had to suffer. That is why His form was marred beyond human semblance. That is why He died. This was His great design to cleanse sinners from guilt in the sight of a holy God by bearing their condemnation in their place.

### **Nothing but the Blood of Jesus**

I was talking to someone recently about an unconverted family member of theirs who refuses to become a Christian. When they were asked why, she replied she could not understand a God who would require blood sacrifice. That was her great stumbling block. Why? Why the cross? Why the horror of Calvary? Why was the servant reduced to a thing, an it, subhuman, torn flesh, unrecognizable? What could possibly demand such a sacrifice? It's in Anselm's famous answer I think helps us see why the cross was necessary when he responded to a very similar question. He said, "You have not yet estimated the great burden of sin, the horror of the cross, and it is horrific, is only conceivable in the light of the horror of sin." "Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders. Shamed, I hear my mocking voice cry out among the scoffers. It was my sin that put Him there until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life; I know that it is finished." "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he himself is the propitiation for our sins," the sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God. "He Himself is the propitiation for our

sins and not for ours only but for the world.” Christ died to sprinkle many nations. There’s room in the work of Jesus for you! He can make you clean! That’s why He died; that’s what His work is. That is the work that will succeed and prosper. He will make sinners who look to Him who will behold God’s servant in faith, He will make them clean. He can do what no other can. He can save you. “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

### **III. The Servant’s Prophetic Words**

And that opening phrase of verse 15 becomes the pivot between the shocking sufferings and the wonderful effects of Christ’s work that together makes sense of the success and the exaltation with which this whole passage begins. Notice how in the remainder of verse 15 we now see the impact that the work of Christ will have. Here’s the third and final reason to behold my servant. First, the servant’s kingly reign, then secondly the servant’s priestly sacrifice, and now at last the servant’s prophetic word. The servant’s prophetic word. Although many are appalled and astonished by the cross, though for many it is a scandal and an offense, it is not that way for everyone. Look at the text. “Kings shall shut their mouths because of him.” Here are the mighty, used to calling the shots and issuing commands. When they speak, everyone else is silent. And here they are now with their hands over their mouths, speechless in awe, before this King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Why? Why has He humbled them? Look at the text. “For that which has not been told them they shall see, that which they have not heard they shall understand.” The Gospel message of Christ crucified has reached them and it has changed them. They take a new posture now. No longer rejecting and scandalized by the cross, no longer demanding and dictating as kings, but meek and silent in submission to the commands and the dictates of another, the word of Christ, the word of the cross penetrates and leads to a radical overhaul in their thinking. Christ, in His prophetic office, speaking through His Word and by His Spirit, illuminates our sin-darkened minds and fills our understanding with truth and brings us to see Him as He is and His cross as our only hope. Here is how the victory, the success, the prudence and wisdom of the exalted servant is seen, today most clearly of all, when men and women, boys and girls hear the Gospel and come to faith in Christ. Here is the kingdom reign of the Lord Jesus made manifest for the world to see when people are converted and churches are planted and the Word of God sheds its light around the world.

### **Light and Life To Those in Darkness**

In some of the small house churches in North Africa where converts to faith in King Jesus rescued out of the darkness of Islam many of them, risking their lives to gather on the Lord’s Day, they sing a simple chorus that bears eloquent testimony to the power of the Word of Christ to bring new life to radically transform the hearts of all who believe the Gospel. It is a song familiar, I’m sure, to every one of us. “I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow

Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.” But in Arabic, they have added a verse that we don’t have in English. It doesn’t rhyme in translation of course but they’ve added another verse. It reads, “If they should chain me or throw me in prison, if they should chain me or throw me in prison, if they should chain me or throw me in prison, no turning back, no turning back.” They have been washed by the blood of the Lamb. He has sprinkled many nations and made them clean. And now that they know the cleansing power of the cross through the ministry, the prophetic ministry of Christ by His Word, no matter what - chains and imprisonment and sufferings included - no matter what there is no turning back.

### **The Victorious Savior**

Jesus is Lord. His victory is real. He won it by the cross and He won it for you. “Behold, my servant,” God says. Look to Jesus. Fix your attention on Him. He acts wisely. He succeeds. He succeeds as King reigning over all. What won’t you risk in His honor knowing that the One who presides over all things is your Savior? He succeeds as Priest - He died to sprinkle many nations; He can make your conscience clean. And He succeeds as Prophet - His Word shatters the darkness and brings light and life to any and all who will behold God’s servant in faith and believe the Gospel. May the Lord be gracious to us to behold God’s servant and life for His glory. Shall we pray together?

*O our Father, forgive us for our wandering eye, for the gaze that drifts so readily from our Savior’s face. Would You wield Your Word in this passage in the weeks ahead to rivet our attention on Christ our King and Priest and Prophet, our comprehensive Savior. Melt our hearts by the Gospel and inflame them in praise and embolden them in service. For we ask it in Jesus’ name, 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](#).