

## **An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Christ in the Old Testament — The Despised**

Isaiah 53

By [Rev. Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III](#)

["O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"]

Keep your hymnals out because I want you to look at the bottom of the page of the hymn you just sang because that hymn, I was going to say that it has the trifecta but it has the double-trifecta. Let me tell you what I mean by that. Not only is that hymn based upon a rich Biblical meditation on the passion of Jesus Christ drawn from the gospel narratives and from passages like Isaiah 53, but notice if you'll look down in the right hand corner at the bottom of the page before hymn 247, the song was written by Hans Leo Hassler, one of the great choral musicians of the Christian church, and it was arranged by none other than Johannes Sebastian Bach, so you have a lot going for you there! Then look over on the left hand side. The words were penned by the man that John Calvin called the greater monk that ever lived, Bernard of Clairvaux. It's a very long poem and this is just an extract of some of the words out of that long poem that meditate on the passion of Jesus Christ. But it was translated by the person who may be my favorite Lutheran hymn writer, Paul Gerhardt. But also part of it was translated by the great Presbyterian minister, J.W. Alexander, so it's a double trifecta! This hymn, it cannot lose! It has six things going for it! I could preach a sermon on those points I think! But I just didn't want you to miss that. That's a great hymn that we often sing at communion time, and appropriately so, but sometimes you're singing these jewels and you just miss the treasures that are right in front of you.

Well if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53. We have this month been looking at a series called, "An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Jesus in the Old Testament," and so far we have seen prophecies about Jesus as the seed promised in Genesis 3:15 who would crush the serpent's head, though the serpent would strike his heel; it's a battle that ends with victory but it also ends with a hero dying. We've seen the prophecy of the coming of Jesus as the virgin's boy in Isaiah 7:14 - a sign of a virgin bearing a baby who would be king. It invited all manner of questions in Isaiah's time and it invited all manner of questions in Mary's time. Then we saw the prophecy of the child in Isaiah 9 verses 6 and 7 especially, a child who was given by God to a people who were walking in darkness and gloom and strife and he would be their peace. The child was a sign for their hope for peace. We looked also at Isaiah 11 and the

prophecy of the branch. In the midst of the desolation of the wilderness of a forest clear cut, there was a promise of a sprig and a stump, a tiny sprout in a clear cut forest, a sign of God's hope, a sign of God's surprising way of rescue. There was the promise of the servant in Isaiah 43 where a people plagued with a problem of idolatry were promised by God and then provided by God with a saving servant.

Then we looked at Ezekiel 34 and the promise of a shepherd. God said, "My spiritual shepherds, the priests and religious leaders, my political shepherds, the king and the ruling class, have abused the sheep and they have failed in their leadership, so I'm going to be the shepherd of my people myself and I'm going to provide my people a shepherd." Which was it going to be? Was God going to be their shepherd or was He going to provide a shepherd? And we said the answer was, "Yes." Then we saw in Micah 5 a promise of a ruler to come, a ruler who would bring true peace to his people, comprehensive blessedness and total well-being. This morning, we saw the promise of the Lord in Psalm 110. David's son turns out to be David's Lord, and before he sits down at God's right hand, he draws all people to himself by being lifted up on a cross. We've seen throughout these prophecies surprises, irony, inversions, the unexpected, but nothing could be so unexpected as the prophecy that we will consider tonight. For the one who is the Seed, the Child, the Branch, the Servant, the Ruler, the Shepherd, the Lord, is also the Despised, and had God not written it down for us through the faithful prophet, Isaiah, we wouldn't believe it with our own eyes or be able to receive it with our own ears. And so we're going to consider the one who was prophesied in his coming to be despised. And before we do, let's pray and ask for God's help and blessing.

*Our heavenly Father, we bow before You tonight thanking You for this opportunity to have been in the ancient book of Your people, the Old Testament, the first part of Your holy Scriptures, so often this Christmas season. We thank You for the way that You've taught us things about the person and work of our Savior that we might have not appreciated before as much. And tonight as we consider again especially His work on our behalf for our salvation, we ask that You would be so gracious as to open our eyes to behold wonderful things in Your Law. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.*

This is the Word of God. Hear it. We're reading all of Isaiah 53:

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 thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

This prophecy of the coming Savior takes our breath away. We're prepared for a king, a ruler, a shepherd, a branch even, a virgin's boy, a child who will be our peace, a seed, a descendant, but the despised? That, we were not expecting. And yet it was the Lord's will and it was the Lord's love and it was the Lord's way for our salvation. It's impossible to do justice to Isaiah 53. One of the old puritans preached a hundred and fifty sermon series on this one chapter and I've got just a few minutes with you tonight. But I'd like you to very briefly see nine things in the passage we've just read. And I'm just touching the surface and I won't take long on these. We'll just work through them very quickly.

## **THE ONE WHO DRAWS ALL MEN TO HIMSELF**

Let's begin by allowing your eyes to fall on verse 2. The one who draws all men to Himself had no physical form or majesty or beauty that makes us want to look at Him. Do you remember this morning when we were studying about the Lord and all His people, all His people would be drawn to Him? And they were, but not because of His physical form or majesty or beauty. "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." I want you to think about that for a moment. You know, one of the things that we prize are our handsome sons and our beautiful daughters. No father or mother ever said, "You know, I hope my daughter is ugly. I hope my son's unattractive." And yet in His love for us, the heavenly Father sent His Son into the world whose appearance did not attract anyone to Him and yet He drew all His people to Himself and we would all declare Him the fairest among ten thousand because of who He is, because of His character, and because of what He's done for us. That's the first thing I want you to see. The one who draws all men to Himself, does not do it by His physical form or majesty or beauty. None of that makes us want to look at Him. There's something else that causes us to fix our eyes on Jesus.

### **THE ONE WHO WAS REJECTED**

Second, if you look at verse 3. Consider the irony, my friends. The one who is our joy, the one who is our comfort, the one who is our peace, the one who is our well-being, was despised, rejected, and lived a life of sorrow and grief. "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." Again, there is not a mother or a father in this room who, when you were holding your child in your arms for the first time prayed, "O God, grant that she would be rejected by her peers. Grant that he would experience isolation and have no friends and walk in this world in grief and sorrow and loneliness." And yet that is what your Savior did. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He is our joy and yet He was despised and rejected and lived a life of sorrow and grief. And I want to say that if you find yourself engulfed in sorrow and grief, hallelujah what a Savior we have, because the one who can give you joy even in your sorrow and grief, knew a deeper sorrow and grief than you will ever know.

### **THE ONE WHO BORE OUR GRIEFS**

Third, look at verse 4. Consider this, my friends. He bore our griefs that we might know joy. He carried our sorrows that we might know true happiness and blessedness. Look at verse 4. "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; and yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." You catch the irony? These sorrows and griefs that He was carrying were not His own! He did not deserve these sorrows and griefs! He was carrying them because he loved you. And yet His contemporaries looked at Him and considered that He was the one cursed of God when the irony is, all of us are the ones who deserve to be cursed of God. And He alone deserved not to be! And yet that we might know joy He bore our griefs and that we might know true happiness and blessedness, He carried our sorrows. That's the third thing I want

you to see.

### **THE ONE WHO TOOK OUR PIERCING FOR SIN**

Here's the fourth thing. Look at verse 5. He took the piercing of our sin that we might feel the healing of God's pardon. He was crushed for our iniquities so that we might finally be alive, out from underneath the weight of our sin. Look at verse 5. "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." We deserve to be pierced with our own sin; He was pierced with our sin that we might feel the touch of God's pardon. We deserve to be crushed for our own iniquities; He was crushed for our iniquities so that we might be out from under the weight of our iniquities and finally alive.

### **THE ONE WHO DID NOT STRAY**

Fifth, look at verse 6. We strayed, He didn't, and yet He bore the burden for our straying. We strayed, He didn't, and yet He bore the burden for our straying. "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."

### **THE ONE WHO WAS OPPRESSED**

Sixth, look at verses 7 to 9. He was oppressed so that we might be free. He was afflicted that we might be whole. He was judged and condemned that we might be declared not guilty. Verses 7 to 9: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, and 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?" They didn't know it. He was oppressed for your freedom; He was afflicted for your wholeness; He was judged and condemned so that you might hear the words of the Judge, "Not guilty. You're free."

### **THE ONE WHO WAS CRUSHED BY GOD**

Seventh, look at verse 10. God crushed Him in order to spare us the crushing that we deserve. "Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief." We just sang of this. Turn to your copy of "The Power of the Cross" in the bulletin. And you see what we sang? Fourth stanza, middle of the page — "Death is crushed to death, life is mine to live, won through Your selfless love." You see the picture. Your eyes opened. The crushing weight and burden of sin is off of

you and you feel more alive than you've ever felt before. You're breathing in freedom. The burden is off your back. And then you look and He is under your sin and He's crushed by it. Death is crushed to death in the crushing of the Son. And now life is yours to live — won through His selfless love. You can't even think of the words to say to thank Him. Your mind is blown.

## **THE ONE WHO WILL BE SATISFIED**

And that leads you to the eighth point. Look at verses 10 and 11. Because He does all of this for the joy set before Him in the satisfaction of His soul. Listen to what Isaiah tells you. When His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring. He knows that His sin offering, His guilt offering, is going to be effectual and you are going to live and He is going to see it and He is going to look you in the eye and say, "I bought you! I saved you! You're mine! You're my child! And all of this was worth it to me." Whereas the author of Hebrews says, "In considering the joy, He despised the shame." "He shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand." And then listen to verse 11. "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied." He shall see, even in the anguish of His soul, the accomplishment of His Father's purposes and the satisfaction of His work, that your debts will not simply be canceled; they will be liquidated. They will no longer exist. And He says, "Father, I will do this for that and for them."

## **THE ONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO JUSTIFY THE WICKED**

And one last thing. Look again at verse 9 — verse 11, sorry. This is my ninth point. "By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." By His knowledge, the righteous one, my servant, will justify many. Do you know what Isaiah's telling you? He's telling you that Jesus knows how to justify the wicked. He knows how to do it. You know, it wouldn't do us any good if He only knew how to justify the righteous, if He only knew how to declare the righteous to be righteous. But our Savior knows how to declare the wicked righteous and He knows how to declare the wicked righteous in a way that does not compromise the righteousness of God. In fact, we could say this. Our Savior knows how to declare the guilty guiltless, guiltlessly. He knows how to declare you and me, the guilty, to be guiltless and to do that guiltlessly, without any compromise of the justice of God, the righteousness of God, the Law of God, but in the full satisfaction of God's justice to pronounce of you, by His grace, the benediction of His peace.

The Seed, the Branch, the Child, the Shepherd, the Servant, the Ruler, the Lord, yes, and the Despised, and the Afflicted, the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief - all of these in one man, predicted in an ancient Christmas, written out on the pages of the Old Testament, hundreds and even thousands of years before

He came. Hallelujah, what a Savior! Let's pray.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You for Jesus, and thank You for telling us what He would be like before He ever came. And may we say, O God, having seen His coming, He was everything You said He'd be and more. Thank You. We love You. We worship You. And we pray to You in Jesus' name, amen.*

Would you stand for the Lord's blessing?

Peace be to the brethren and love with faith from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, until the daybreak and the shadows flee away. Amen.

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