

The Servant's Sacrifice

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Date: 10 April 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, as we come to this fourth and final song in our series, hopefully we're all beginning to see the outline of a familiar face in these servant songs.

If you've been a Christian any length of time or been familiar with the Bible, the portrait that Isaiah has given us of a promised and obedient yet secret and suffering servant king should be recognizable to us as the profile of Jesus Christ himself.

And this final song brings together all those threads to show us unmistakably that this is who Isaiah is speaking about. And it's worth just kind of pausing and taking that in, isn't it?

I think it's something that if we're familiar with that truth can be lost on us sometimes that Isaiah could write so clearly about the person and life and words and work of Jesus 700 years before he came into the world.

John told us this morning, didn't he? Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of him. And that should just cause us to see again how unique and significant Jesus is in God's plan and in the history of our world, that God's people could sing of him then as we have sung of him this evening.

[1 : 30] For him, for them back then, he was promised, but for us, he is present. And so for them back then, as for us now, God calls us through Isaiah this evening in chapter 52, again in verse 12, as he has throughout these songs one last time, to see my servant.

See my servant. And as the climax to these songs, to see supremely the servant's sacrifice. Now, the intro in chapter 52 into this song pulls together so many of the themes we've seen so far that this servant would be raised and lifted up and exalted, glorified by God.

And yet before that, verse 14, he would be disfigured beyond that of any human being, his form marred beyond human likeness. But just as many would shower him with insults and sufferings and curses, so through his suffering, verse 15, he would sprinkle many.

That is, sprinkle them clean right before God. And when that wonderful news of his work breaks into the world, the nations, the islands, distant countries, kings, rulers would hear what he has done and put their hands over their mouths and bow before him.

For what they had not been told, they will see. And what they had not heard, they will understand. And so tonight we, who live at the very ends of the earth, so far removed from these things, who hear this good news, we are called again to see this servant, to see his sacrifice, and to glorify him for it.

[3 : 22] But how do we see him? Isaiah starts this song by admitting that at first, his people saw him wrongly. We were ashamed of his suffering, says Isaiah.

Verse 1 begins with those statements of disbelief that we saw this morning in John's gospel. For who has believed our message? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

See, Isaiah speaking for God's people is the first to say, we didn't get it. We saw him, but at first we didn't recognize him.

And who would have? He had very humble beginnings. He grew up before the Lord like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground. We at home planted some garlic in the garden recently.

It's not the fanciest vegetable, but it's easy to grow. Or so we thought until Dudley, the dog, got out in the garden and dug around. And just as those garlicks were beginning to send their little green shoots out, they disappeared all of a sudden.

[4 : 34] And they're a sorry sight. They're beginning to make a comeback. But what was already destined not to be a thing of beauty, now looks like it's not going to become very much at all.

And Isaiah is saying, that was everyone's first thought when they saw the servant. A fragile shoot growing out of dry ground, totally unimpressive, going nowhere, voted least likely to succeed in his generation.

And of course, we know this is how it was when the servant finally did come. He was born, wasn't he, in the humblest circumstances imaginable.

His first night spent in a feeding trough because there was no place for him. Born to parents who had risked disgrace through the pregnancy.

Born to parents who had to flee the country, cross borders to ensure his safety. And but for a select few who were in on the secret, who would ever have guessed that this child was born to be the savior of the world?

[5 : 55] You know, looking back, it's easy to think that we would have known differently had we been there. We would have seen something in him. We would have picked up the promises. But what would we have seen differently?

What would we have seen when we looked at Jesus? We would have seen an ordinary man. He had no beauty or majesty, says Isaiah, to attract us to him.

Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He didn't have a halo. He wasn't super muscly or a foot higher than everyone else.

He didn't have an aura of divinity following him around. He would have seen to us like any of the people that we pass on the street or have meetings with or stand next to you or sit with in church.

In the year 451, church leaders got together to try to sum up what they believed about the person of Jesus from the Bible.

[6 : 57] What they wrote is called the definition of Chalcedon. And it's one of the great creeds of the Christian faith. It's easier to read than you would think. And they wrote that Jesus was both truly and properly God and truly and properly human.

How human was he, you wonder? Well, they write this, like us in all things, like us in all things, yet without sin.

This means that Jesus on earth got hungry and thirsty and had his favorite things to eat and to drink. He got tired and had a better or worse night's sleep.

He had to balance a budget and he had better and worse days at work, like us in all things, except sin. And so he wasn't recognized and he got no special treatment.

In fact, quite the opposite, verse 3. He was despised and rejected by mankind. A man of suffering and familiar with pain, like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised.

[8 : 12] And we held him in low esteem. Isaiah is saying, not only did the people of his day not see anything special in him, but they were ashamed of him.

They saw him coming and kept their eyes glued to the ground. And so throughout his life, the servant would be a man of sorrows and familiar with grief.

But why was that? Well, this is the key, isn't it, in verse 4. This is the realization. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering.

You know, at what point did Jesus begin to do that, to suffer in our place? Well, not at the cross and not in the garden, but in the stable.

He entered into our suffering and pain. He took on himself the curse for our sin when he took on himself our human nature in his incarnation.

[9 : 17] The only human being born since the fall who rightfully shouldn't have suffered and shouldn't have felt pain, yet he did. Why, says Isaiah, because he took up our pain.

And bore our suffering. Not only with us, but shortly we'll see for us. And looking back, says Isaiah, we can see that now, but at the time, we only saw him punished by God as if he deserved it.

As if he deserved it. And friends, again, it's easy to think that we would have known better. We wouldn't have gone with the crowd.

But would we have recognized the servant? Would we have done any different? I don't think so. Why would we have? The crowd cried out for his blood.

His closest followers deserted him. They denied ever knowing him. Why do we think that it would have been any different with us?

[10 : 28] Friends, we are separated by a space of 2,000 years, but the human heart has not changed. And apart from God's grace, our hearts are no different from theirs.

It's only in the light of his finished work when God's spirit brings this person home to us that we can see the servant rightly. And that's what Isaiah shows us next.

We were ashamed of his suffering, but he was sacrificed for our sins. That word, but, there at the start of verse 5, represents a turning point from what we all thought was going on to what was really going on.

This is the realization at the heart of this song. And what was really going on, says Isaiah, isn't that the servant was suffering for his own sins, but was suffering instead of us, for our sins.

Here is the shocking realization. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

[11 : 36] The punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds, we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us turned to our own way.

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. This is one of the places in the Bible that makes clearest for us why it was that Jesus suffered and died.

Incredible that we find it in the book of Isaiah. He died, says the prophet, not because he had offended God, but because we have offended God. That is what those words iniquities and transgressions mean.

The shorthand word we often use, the umbrella term, is the word sin. Verse six unpacks that, doesn't it? What is sin? Well, think of sheep, says Isaiah.

Sheep who have stopped following the shepherd. They've wandered off the beaten track, got lost in a ditch, run up a hill into other fields.

[12 : 44] We have gone off God's way and gone our own way instead. Stopped following the shepherd, started following me.

We've rebelled, says Isaiah, chosen to do so, to think and be and do what he would not have us, to be and think and do.

And we have done it as thoughtlessly and carelessly as sheep, looking for greener grass somewhere else. That is sin, says Isaiah.

Choosing to live this life without God, not in God's way. And he is unsparing, isn't he? We have all done that. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, he says.

Some of you will have heard this on Wednesday evening from the video that we watched at the prayer meeting. But we heard in that video about a church with a banner outside it, didn't we, that said, this church is for sinners only.

[13 : 48] And Isaiah is saying that that could be said of any church. Hey, this church. It's a shocking thought. But if that wasn't true, that I couldn't be here, and neither could ye.

This church is for sinners only. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But this is what was really going on with the servant, says Isaiah.

He was suffering and put to death to pay for that, for our sin. And the phrase that Isaiah gives us, not directly, but we'll see how he gets there, is penal substitutionary atonement.

Okay, long words. We'll unpack that. Okay, what our sin deserves is there in verse five, punishment. See, that punishment. So it was a penal death, the penalty for sin.

But remember, he was sentenced to death for sins he didn't commit. So it was also a substitutionary death because he was taking the punishment in our place, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

[15 : 02] And the effect of that is in there too, look, verse five. It was a punishment that brought us peace. That is atonement. A word designed in English to capture what Christ's death on the cross achieved for us, to make us literally at one with God.

At one-ment. That is where the word comes from. Atonement, bringing together. So this final song, this wonderful truth has been called the jewel in the crown of Isaiah's theology and rightly so.

Because this is the fullest and final answer to that burning question that we started with back at the start of our series. How will God save his people? How will he do it this time?

We've blown it, haven't we? No, Isaiah says, God will save you through the servant's penal substitutionary atonement, taking the punishment for your sins in your place to give you peace with God again.

He would become the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. He would be crushed in our place so that God could crush our sin without crushing us.

[16 : 26] But in order for him to do that, someone needed to be crushed to carry that sin before him and to die. And this is the servant doing it.

We tend to use that word sacrifice quite lightly, don't we, in our daily lives doing something costly for someone. Maybe that is more difficult for us than we would have chosen.

But Jesus' sacrifice was more literal than that. See, verse 6 is describing what would happen to lambs on the day of atonement in the Old Testament.

As we read in Leviticus chapter 16, the high priest would take the lamb, lay his hands on its head, and we read, confess over it all the iniquities of the people, all the transgressions, all the sins, lay upon it the sins of the people.

And so symbolically, the high priest has sent this lamb into the presence of God, bearing the people's sins on its head. And so it was, verse 6, says Isaiah, for the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world that the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[17 : 41] It's that same picture. But instead of the priest symbolically laying sins on the head of a lamb, it is God really laying our sins on the head of the Lord Jesus.

That is what was really going on, says Isaiah. We thought he was suffering for sins all his own, but he was actually suffering for ours to make us one with God again so that we, sinners though we are, can have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ if our trust is in him and his finished work.

That is the good news of Jesus, isn't it? Here in the book of Isaiah that we can have this peace again, our sins forgiven to be right with God.

And tonight, friends, Isaiah simply says, look on the servant and live. Look on my servant and live. But how can that be fair, we wonder.

How can it be right that he would be punished for our sins? Well, thirdly, Isaiah says, humanly speaking, it wasn't fair and we knew it. Thirdly then, we saw only his oppression, says Isaiah.

[19 : 02] Notice Isaiah's pivoting back and forth between what they thought was going on and what was actually going on. they saw the human drama and the travesty unfold.

But again, they didn't think that much of it. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. Yet, who of his generation protested? Because they saw only a human travesty and not a divine drama at work.

They saw simply a man tried under false charges and taken away to die. They didn't see, verse 10, that what was happening was the Lord's will. And yet, this is the admission, I guess, the confession Isaiah's making.

Even at the time, we could see it was unjust oppression. That the servant was taken before his shearers like a sheep, taken to slaughter like a lamb.

He was handed over into the hands of those who would do him harm. And yet, twice, Isaiah says, he did not open his mouth. He did not open his mouth.

[20 : 14] And the whole gravity of that situation lands on us when we see it happening. Jesus being accused by the leaders of starting a revolution, of blaspheming, of committing crimes against God and humanity.

and Jesus would not answer the charges. He did not try to clear himself of sins he hadn't committed. He didn't put up a defense.

He didn't argue his case because he knew that's why he had come. His accusers for their part didn't care whether or not it was true. They just wanted Jesus got rid of.

And Isaiah calls that what it is, oppression, injustice. It was the greatest perversion of justice this world has ever seen. And yet Jesus bore it silently like a lamb taken to slaughter.

Even after he had died, even then, says Isaiah, he would be untreated unjustly, signed a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death. Something we often gloss over, I think, that Jesus was laid in a tomb borrowed from a man called Joseph of Arimathea.

[21 : 35] And Luke tells us he was a member of the very council that had condemned Jesus to death. He adds in that Joseph didn't agree with that decision, that he was seeking the kingdom of God, but even so, it was an undignified burial.

That tomb was no place for the guiltless, sinless servant. But as far as anyone was concerned at the time, says Isaiah, that was that.

It was at best a human tragedy. What could anyone say about it? Nobody could argue against it, at least of all, the servant himself who willingly suffered this injustice so that God might be both just in his punishment of sin and the justifier of sinners who have faith in him.

But very lastly, we see that human drama wasn't all that was going on because finally, Isaiah tells us, in fact, that human injustice was all part of a bigger drama.

We saw only his oppression, he says, but he was raised up by God. And there's that pivot again in verse 10, yet, yet it was the Lord's will to crush him, to cause him to suffer.

[22 : 58] And though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days. And the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

See, after it's all played out, the arrest, trial, and death of the servant would not only be a human drama, but part of God's wider plan for his servant.

It was the Lord's will to do it. And the servant did not do it unwillingly, did he? The servant would see it through. God's will would prosper in his hand. We've seen all the way through these songs the unbreakable unity that there is between servant and God, father and son in saving the lost.

That the plan for the son to come into the world to become the servant laid before the foundation of the world would be carried out perfectly by Jesus. And now at last we see that just as Jesus was faithful and obedient to his father even to the point of death on the cross.

So the father was faithful to Jesus in raising him from the dead and making good on his promise to make his name great to the ends of the end.

[24 : 21] See, after he had suffered, after he had died, he would see the light of life again be raised, as we heard, he would be rewarded greatly because of his finished work. In that verse 12, therefore, because of this, I will give him a portion among the greats, because he poured out his life onto the earth and was not a portion of his life.

This is Isaiah, the story could not end, could not end with his suffering and oppression as if it were a purely human event. It had to end with his life and greatness and glory because it was a divine drama.

The story played out between God and his servant for the salvation of many. And so it would be that through the servant's suffering and death and resurrection, all the promises of God to his servant and to his people would be fulfilled.

We started this short series with the question, how could it be that God would save his people from their sin? And we've seen the answer play out through these songs, haven't we?

See my servant, see my servant, sent to rule rightly, to speak the truth, to open blind eyes, to live obediently, to suffer willingly, to trust wholeheartedly, to be misunderstood, to be condemned, to die, to be raised.

[26 : 01] And at the end of these songs, the Lord says, to see my servant then is to see your salvation. To see my servant is to see your salvation.

And all along we have seen, haven't we, that the identity of this servant can be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. If we were in any doubt as we close, we heard this earlier in our service, didn't we, from Acts chapter 8.

It was this song that the man was reading in his chariot. As Philip came up by him, he was led like a sheep to the slaughter. As a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. The eunuch asked Philip, tell me please, who is this prophet talking about himself or someone else?

Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. The good news about Jesus.

[27 : 10] See my servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, says our God. And so as we finish, have we tonight recognized this wonderful figure for who he is, the suffering servant, our Lord Jesus?

have we put our trust in him and his finished work for our salvation as he has been promised to us to be our savior. This is how God has always planned, promised to save us from our sin.

From the time of Isaiah way back to the garden to this present day and to the very last day when he will return, God promises that to look upon his servant Jesus in faith is to be saved.

Salvation is found in no one else, says Peter, for there is no other name under heaven given to us by which we must be saved. He is God's answer to our deepest need to have our sins taken away and to be at one with God again.

And so tonight, if you have not seen him or come to him or put your trust in him for his saving work, would you not do so? Here he is promised for you.

[28 : 28] Here he is come to live in the flesh, to live and die and rise again for you. And if you have your trust in Jesus tonight, if you worship him, well let us glorify him as God has done.

Let us make much of him. Let's make his name great to the ends of the earth for all that he has done for us. He deserves the highest praise and our deepest devotion and our longest serving faithfulness, does he not?

And so let us render it to him freely and in full for his free and full and loving sacrifice for us. God, our Father, has raised up his servant Jesus in glory and honor.

and so let us do that in our hearts, in our lives, in our homes, in our church, in our city, in our world.

For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. Let's bow before him in prayer together. Let's pray. Let's pray.

[29 : 36] Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you and worship and praise you this evening for you are the one who so willingly came to bear our suffering, to be crushed for our iniquities, to be pierced for our transgressions.

Lord Jesus, we marvel that as you stood before your accusers, you opened not your mouth. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you did this in love.

For there are a thousand ways that you could have escaped the suffering of the cross and yet you obeyed even unto death. That you might become a ransom for us.

That your blood might be poured out for our forgiveness. And so, our Father, we pray that you would help us to lift Jesus high in our hearts.

That he would be the theme of all our praises. That his glory would outshine, Lord, every other love and ambition and desire, Lord, in our lives.

[30 : 55] That the light of his glory would shine upon our hearts in such a way that we would be transformed by him. Lord, that our hearts would overflow with thankfulness to him.

And that out of hearts filled with thanks and changed by grace, Lord, that we would live lives worthy of the gospel to which you have called us. Father, we pray that his glory would be lifted high in our church and in our city, Lord, in this coming week as we focus on and celebrate the events of his death and resurrection.

Father, Father, how we pray that he, by your spirit, would be at work in the hearts of many, that some might come to hear this good news and be saved unto eternal life through it.

Lord, we thank you for him who is our savior and we pray, Father, that you would allow us to make him known this coming week. We ask in his name.

Amen.