

The Suffering Servant

Isaiah 52.13 - 53.12

¹³ *Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.*

The servant of Yahweh will prosper but not yet, he has a task to complete that cannot be accomplished if he does not humble himself and submit himself entirely to the will of his God even if that ends him in suffering to the point of death. Then once he has gone through the fiery trials that await him he will be greatly exalted.

¹⁴ *Just as many were astonished at you, My people, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men.*

“My people” is not in the text. The NAB reads “Even as many were amazed at him-- so marred was his look beyond that of man, and his appearance beyond that of mortals.” The NET reads “(just as many were horrified by the sight of you) he was so disfigured he no longer looked like a man;”

This servant of Yahweh will be beaten severely though not as a punishment for his disobedience. For what reason is this servant beaten?

¹⁵ *Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand.*

Hebrew experts mostly agree that “sprinkle”¹ should be translated “startle” (cf. NAB, NET, LXX, RSV, NRSV, NJB, NLT, JPS). This human has been so disfigured, so marred, so irreversibly damaged that his sight is shocking to the eye. Indeed the nations reel at him and kings shut their mouths.

¹⁶ *Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*

Who would even believe this message? “Nothing is more outrageous than to hear that God’s sinless Son would die on behalf of all people. This story is the ultimate stumbling block for those looking for a Messiah who would come as a conquering king.”²

“We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1.23-24)

² *For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.*

¹ If the word is taken as sprinkle a new interpretation opens up: Through the abuse he suffers the servant of Yahweh will sprinkle many nations. Under the Mosaic Law on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial animal on the altar to “make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities” (Lev 16.16).

Or more likely this refers to the law of cleansing one who has become unclean. If someone in Israel touched a dead body, a grave, a human bone, or was in the same tent as someone who died was considered unclean until they went through a ritual involving the sprinkling of a special liquid (the ashes of a red heifer mixed with water from a stream) (Num 19.14-20). By definition the Gentiles were unclean and entering the house of a non-Israelite resulted in uncleanness at least by NT times (John 18.28; Acts 10.28; 11.23). It is therefore all the more remarkable that the suffering of this servant of Yahweh results in the sprinkling (i.e. cleansing) of many nations (gentiles).

² Pastor Steve Taylor of Lakeshore Bible Church, Tempe Arizona, Sermon Notes from March 9th, 2008.

This man did not grow up in the palaces of royalty. He is not to be compared to those great cedars of Lebanon, but rather to mere shoot off a branch—something that would normally be considered common and even expendable. He is not like the oaks of Bashan flourishing in a forest of hospitable conditions, but rather he is a root surrounded by the hostility of parched ground—one who was not prideful but fully acquainted with the struggle for survival. Even so he grew up before Him—God—which is to say that he lived his whole life in the presence and under the watchful eye of the Almighty.

Yet his appearance was common, easily confused with other men of his time. In such a way Jesus was able to slip into the crowds, eluding the grasp of the authorities. So indistinct were his features that Judas while betraying him, found it necessary to kiss him as a sign to his adversaries that he was the one they wanted. He is not like the stars of our age, who would be disqualified up front unless they have artificially whitened teeth, a fashionable haircut, a lean figure, and a beauty that instantly grabs the eye. He is common. He is one of us. He is not in the minuscule minority of pretty people, but one who fits in with the majority.

³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

He is not the winner of American Idol or any other such popularity contest; rather he is the one who would receive the least number of votes because he is despised and forsaken. Unlike Herod Antipas (the ruler in Galilee) who constantly courted Rome’s approval while seeking after the love of the people, this one does not woo the crowds.

He is a “man of sorrows,” acquainted not with sumptuous meals and the extravagance of wealth, but with grief. One who saw him was more likely to pass him over than esteem him to be someone great. Even his own people did not receive him.

“He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.” (John 1.11)

⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

He is not in this for his own benefit; he is doing something for us. Our infirmities, our pain, our grief, and our sorrows he carries on his shoulders. Even so, we do not recognize that this is what is happening. Instead of gratitude we look at the pitiful figure and say, “surely he is cursed by God, what must he have done to deserve this.” All the while we do not realize that it is our own pain written on his face.

⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

He is pierced through, crushed because of the sin of others. It was not for any crime of his own that he was beaten. He is at once innocent but also enters into solidarity with us. He is endured the chastening (punishment) that makes us well. It is for our benefit that he endures blow after blow from the scourge. And somehow, by this process he is not merely wounded but we are also healed.

⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

We have not kept the law of God as we should have. We have not served God with all our hearts, all of our mind, all of our strength, all of our being. We have gone astray; each and every one of us has turned to our own way. We have defiled ourselves with our willing rebellion, our pride, our wicked heart that cries out “no one will rule over me. I can do this on my own. I don’t need anyone to tell me what to do.” Through such efforts we have shaken our

fist in the face of our Creator and separated ourselves from him. In an effort to break free we find ourselves slaves to sin and addicted to self-destruction.

But God does not leave us in such a pathetic state of affairs! Just when we were crushing under the weight of our own selfish sins God in an act of outrageous mercy lifted the mountain of guilt and allowed it to fall on his servant. Yahweh in his astounding love for us has caused this iniquity which we thought we could bear to fall on the shoulders of one who truly can bear it.

⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

The usual cries of complaint and murmurs of injustice that one would expect did not pass by his lips. He was oppressed and afflicted by the consequences of other's actions yet he would not open his mouth. He did not avenge himself nor did he seek from God that his vengeance would fall on his enemies. He kept his mouth closed staggering the world with his silence. When brought before kings he would not even seek to defend himself. He knew what awaited him yet he did not seize upon a private moment with the willing procurator to secure for himself an escape route from the plan of his God.

“And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.” (Matthew 27.12-14)

⁸ 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 For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?

“Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away, and who would have thought any more of his destiny? When he was cut off from the land of the living, and smitten for the sin of his people” (NAB)

“He was led away after an unjust trial- but who even cared? Indeed, he was cut off from the land of the living; because of the rebellion of his own people he was wounded.” (NET)

He was led away after a mock trial fit only for someone that was either so guilty as to not need an authentic trial or else someone so difficult to prove guilty that he must be rushed the motions of “justice” quickly and under the cover of night lest others are made aware of his innocence. And who was there to advocate for him? Who sounded the alarm of injustice loud and clear? Even his own disciples had left him, fleeing for fear of their own arrest. The chief of which did not stand up for him but denied him over and again until he horrified himself at his cowardice.

His suffering, his wounds, his torture, brought his body beyond the point of remedy. With many stripes upon his back and nails through his hands and feet he continued on past the point of no return. With all the violence of a world drunk with pride and blinded by its own rage he, this servant of Yahweh, absorbed it all. “While being reviled, he did not revile in return; while suffering, he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *himself* to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet 2.23).

He was brought to the brink of pit and having stared deeply into it, he whispered “it is finished” and he bowed his head exhaling his last breath (John 19.30).

⁹ His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

He had not broken the Law of God nor was he even deceitful, for he had no reason to be deceptive. He had done no violence; never had he assaulted others though he had received the fiercest attack. "They intended to bury him with criminals, but he ended up in a rich man's tomb" (NET). Since he had done nothing wrong it was only fitting that Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb which had been hewn out in the rock (Mark 15:42-46).

¹⁰ But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

Yahweh was pleased to crush him not because he enjoyed the process but because of the incalculable good that will result from this voluntary action. This is no case of divine child abuse, but the horrifying result of our own sin meeting the wrath of a holy God, hungry for redemption not blood.

Furthermore it is essential to stress that this servant of Yahweh volunteers for this work. The language is conditional: "if he would render himself as a guilt offering..." which indicates that he has a choice. We are not observing a case where someone is being forced to be the scapegoat against his will. He is not just someone who is in the wrong place at the wrong time. Jesus did not merely fall victim to the volatile political paranoia of a vicious Roman procurator nor did he unwittingly fall into the trap of conspiring, jealous, religious leaders. He was not crucified just because men hated him. It was the will of the Father to crush him, to put him to grief. This was the plan from the beginning (Gen 3:15).

²² "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death." (Acts 2:22-23).

He will be the guilt offering (or his life is given as an offering for sin cf. NAB) calls to mind the sacrificial system of the Law under which Jesus lived and died. In order to expiate for the sins of the people an animal would be killed and offered to God on the altar. Similarly, Jesus through his work on the cross nullifies the guilt of the people and redeems them with his blood.

⁹ "And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ "You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)

Even though he offers his life (lit. soul) as a guilt offering he will see his offspring. This indicates that he will not stay dead for the dead no nothing (Ecc 9:5) nor are they capable of observing what is done under the sun (Ecc 9:10). In order for him to see his offspring, his seed, he must somehow live again. And when this occurs the good pleasure of Yahweh will prosper in his hand. He will carry out the desires of God. One day the will of God will be done on earth as in heaven (Mat 6:10).

¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

When the work is completed the servant will look back upon what has been done, difficult though it was, and be satisfied in it because by his suffering many are justified—declared righteous—and their iniquities which they could not atone for have been lifted from them.

⁶ "...our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin." (Romans 6:6-7)

¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

He will be given the ultimate inheritance. Because he poured out his soul to death and though not a transgressor was numbered among them he will be exalted.

meaning of the cross in 1st century Judea.

- . it was a horrifying site
- .deterrent to others
- .public display
- .humiliating (naked)
- .extremely painful
- ."cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Deut 21.23; Gal 3.13)
- .symbol of Rome's power (in particular Caesar)

Jesus crucifixion in particular

- .the sign: "this is Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews"
- .crucified for claiming to be the messiah
- .sign was meant to ironic
- .the scoffers

³⁵ And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" ³⁸ Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." ³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" (Luke 23.35-39)

- .the disciples (two options: go home or find another messiah)
- .cognitive dissonance for three days
- .the men on the road to Emmaus
 - "we thought he would be the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24.??)

Three days later God raised him from the dead

- .reversed everything
- .cross turned upside down
- .rather than the torture device of hatred it is the salvation mechanism for God's love
- .rather than substantiating Caesar's right to be the son of god, the lord of the world, it showed how God through his true son, Jesus, has broken the power of Caesar, broken the power of Satan, broken the power of violence itself...
- .Jesus absorbed all of the violence, all of the hatred, all of the disgrace, and did not return evil for evil and in so doing broke the power of hatred and evil
- .father forgive them (Luke 23.34)
- .in the midst of the most difficult and heinous circumstances this servant of Yahweh by his suffering conquered the powers of evil
- .alas love is more powerful than hate and the love of God manifested through his son infinitely more powerful than all of the venomous hatred of the serpent and his minions
- .through the resurrection God has vindicated his son and caused the sign to have a double irony...this really is the king of the Jews

But it doesn't stop there...Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God

³² "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³ "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. ³⁴ "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: "THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, ³⁵ UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR

YOUR FEET." ³⁶ "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2.32-36)

⁸ "...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2.8-11)

¹⁹ "...the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. " (Ephesians 1.19-23)

But it doesn't stop there...Jesus is coming back to establish the kingdom of God

¹⁹ Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time." (Acts 3.19-21)

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign." (Revelation 11.15-17)

What is our response?

.time to make a decision. Are you willing to accept God's offer of salvation?
.if you are already bondsman of Christ then this applies to you

1 Peter 2.21-25

²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example **for you to follow in His steps**,

²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, **so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness**; for by His wounds you were healed.

²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

We follow in his steps and die to sin and live to righteousness. He will help us.

If time read, Hebrews 12:1-5