

Healed by His Bruises

Lesson Text: Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12 **Background Scripture:** Isaiah 53:1-12

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 10:10-18

Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12

⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

¹⁰ Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, 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. ¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

LESSON AIMS:

- **Facts:** to show the extent of Jesus' physical suffering for us.
- **Principle:** to realize that by His stripes we are healed.
- **Application:** to understand that we appropriate the healing of Jesus for ourselves when we receive His death as done for us.

INTRODUCTION

Superman

We live in a world that needs a savior. Countless lives are broken, beaten, and confused. We need someone to intervene—someone to expose the lies that dominate our lives and to set us on the right course. In the late nineteenth century, the atheistic philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche identified just the sort of savior he thought this world needed. His idealized savior was a man, but certainly no ordinary man. Nietzsche's description of a value-creating being translates somewhat loosely into English as "superman." Nietzsche's vision of such an individual was that of a man who rejects any notion that God or any other being outside the world should be the source of values to govern the world. Nietzsche suggested instead that this superman would trust his own intuitive sense of good and evil.

This superman's sense of right and wrong would be rooted in what helps him succeed and prevents him from failing. Since the superman observes that everything in this world is in a constant state of flux, he acknowledges that all that exists now, including his current value system, must be overcome by what comes next. To keep current, this superman must reinvent himself continually in order to become stronger. Thus, according to Nietzsche, what this world needs is a being that draws on his own internal resources to master the practice of overcoming his former self. If the brightest minds of our day were to design the savior they think this world needs, it might not look much different from Nietzsche's.

It might still be an individual who spurns tradition and is accountable to no one but himself or herself. Or perhaps it would look like one of the countless conflicted heroes of the comic books.

After her decimation by Babylon, the nation of Israel also needed a savior. Israel needed someone who could meet them where they were, overcome their sin, and set them on the right course. Today's passage reveals God's promise to send them the hero they needed. But the hero they received was nothing like anyone expected.

LESSON BACKGROUND **Time:** about 700 – 695 B.C. **Place:** Jerusalem

Isaiah 53 addresses the same historical context that was addressed in the last three lessons: God comforted His people Israel, who were oppressed by the Babylonians (although that oppression was many decades in the future as Isaiah wrote). The people were calling into question God's sovereignty and their own future. Yet today's passage also takes place in a wider biblical context that is important to its proper understanding.

This particular "Servant Song," which begins in 52:13, is quoted multiple times in the New Testament as a description of Jesus' ministry, death, and burial (examples: Matthew 8:17; Luke 22:37; 1 Peter 2:22). Perhaps the most well-known

passage that connects Jesus with the servant of today's passage is Acts 8:26-35, in which Philip evangelized the Ethiopian eunuch.

The eunuch was reading from an Isaiah scroll and was confused by the verses we now identify as Isaiah 53:7,8. That is the passage that describes the suffering servant as a sheep being led to slaughter. Philip immediately identified the servant as Jesus and explained the gospel. This current lesson will discuss this passage in its context and highlight how it points beyond events of the sixth century B.C. toward the work of Christ.

The last three verses of Isaiah 52, which directly precede today's text, discuss how God's servant is to be exalted despite the reaction of the startled nations. The nations were taken aback by the servant's arrival because they didn't see it coming. It wasn't revealed to them as it was to Israel. Yet all nations will indeed have to reckon with this startling servant.

SUFFERING SERVANT (Isaiah 53:4,5)

Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 is the third of the Servant Songs and the most familiar of all, especially to Christians. Here we see both the travail and the triumph of the Servant. While some of the other Servant Songs could arguably be applied to Israel, this one definitely depicts the sufferings of an individual.

As the Ethiopian eunuch does in Acts 8:34, scholars puzzle over the identity of this servant. As he read this passage, the Ethiopian eunuch asked an appropriate question: "*who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?*" (Acts 8:34). While acknowledging the need for guidance in understanding this text (v. 31), it was clear to the eunuch that Isaiah was speaking of a certain man. Of course, Christians recognize that man as the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since Isaiah 53 is rarely read in Jewish synagogues today, it is understandable that modern Jews are unaware of how closely it parallels the sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth. Those involved in Jewish evangelism frequently appeal to Isaiah 53 in their efforts to convince Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Whether dealing with Jews or Gentiles, however, those preaching Christ are still asking, "*Who has believed our report?*" (Isa. 53:1; cf. John 12:38; Rom. 10:16).

1. How does Isaiah 53 fit into its overall context?

According to this verse, God's people are to recognize God's hand at work: it is God himself who strikes the servant. The servant somehow (as we shall see) carries the burden of the people into His suffering. He does not suffer as a solitary individual, but as a representative of God's people.

As Christians, we are reminded of Hebrews 4:15. Jesus is a high priest who can sympathize with our weakness. In becoming flesh, He bears our humanity and identifies with our weakness. Christians see in Jesus a model for ministry: believers seeking to win the lost should find concrete ways to identify with the lost and meet them where they are. Until we walk in people's shoes, they seldom care about our faith in Jesus.

Jesus' suffering is not only a means to satisfy God's justice, it is also a model for how love conquers evil. It shows Christians how to break through the hard shell of resistance that surrounds people trapped in a life of sin. Jesus does not bear the sufferings of humanity only at the cross, but also throughout His ministry (Matthew 8:16,17).

2. In what ways did Jesus carry our sorrows? (Isaiah 53:4)

We are taught further that the servant's identification with God's people has saving consequences. The servant bears not only the sorrows of the people, but also their sins (transgressions). Here it is clear that the servant's suffering is not for wrongs He has done, but for what others have done. Indeed, He had no sin (Heb. 4:15); otherwise, He could not have suffered on behalf of sinners, bearing the wrath of God for us. Moreover, it is effective: healing and peace result from the servant's suffering.

Once we come to the New Testament, we better understand what Christ did for us at Calvary, where He "*died for our sins according to the scriptures*" (1 Cor. 15:3). Paul further declared that the *One* "*who knew no sin*" became sin for us "*that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*" (1 Cor. 5:21). Peter also wrote that Christ in "*He himself bore our sins*" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "*by his wounds you have been healed.*" (1 Peter 2:24). These last words come from Isaiah 53:5, indicating that Peter understood the healing to be primarily spiritual in nature, namely, the offer of cleansing through Christ's shed blood (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:28; 1 John 1:7).

Indeed the *“punishment that brought us peace was upon him”* (Isa. 53:5). Christ suffered to procure our peace with God. *“In Christ alone is life and salvation. He alone brought medicine to us, and even procures health by his weakness, and life by his death; for he alone hath pacified the Father, he alone hath reconciled us to him”* (Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries: Isaiah, AP&A).

3. What is the nature of the healing we received through the stripes of the Servant? (v. 5)

STRAYING SHEEP (Isaiah 53:6)

Now we are told why the servant has to suffer: the servant suffers because God's people act like wandering sheep. Since they refuse to obey the shepherd, the shepherd has to break their cycle of rebellion. Isaiah 40:2 tells us that Israel pays for its sin in full as a result of the Babylonian exile. But that payment is not enough to change the course of sinful human history permanently. Wandering will resume. It too will need to be punished. So, God in His sovereign will sends the servant to suffer. God breaks the endless cycle of sin and punishment by introducing something surely unexpected: the innocent sufferer.

Out of love and grace, God takes the initiative and makes a way for His people to avoid the endless cycle of guilt and punishment. That is the point of this passage, and we need to be careful not to miss this point.

4. Why are sheep an apt illustration of human sinfulness? (v. 6)

What Do You Think?

What can we do to have the mind of Christ toward the scattered sheep?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Christ's view (Matthew 9:36)
- Our obligation (John 21:17)
- Urgency (Matthew 18:12,13)

SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE (Isaiah 53:10-12)

In spite of the fact that the Servant *“had done no violence”* (v. 9), He was *“despised and rejected by men”* (v. 3). He had not been deceitful in any way; *“yet it was the Lord's to crush bruise him”* (v. 10), a seeming rejection by even the Almighty. *“The Servant's anguish was in every way the fulfillment of a great divine plan. It had been foreshadowed by sacrifices. Nothing about it was accidental”* (Leupold).

However, in this verse an important transition takes place. The servant—who does not have offspring, whose days are cut short, and who experiences sorrow—undergoes a reversal of fortune. He sees His offspring (seed), lives longer (shall prolong his days), and prospers in the Lord. Though it first appears as if the Lord simply “uses up” this innocent servant on behalf of the guilty, ultimately the Lord vindicates the servant. Death is not the final word, but the beginning of a new era of prosperity.

The pattern represented in this verse is captured nicely in Philippians 2:6–11. There Paul notes how Jesus lowered himself, became obedient to the point of death, and was exalted on high. Jesus therefore fulfills this prophecy. Jesus' offspring are not biological descendants of course, but are disciples throughout the earth (Galatians 3:26–4:7).

5. How was the Servant's anguish part of God's divine plan? (v. 10)

The final two verses of our passage echo verse 10 but add greater detail. They restate that the servant suffers to the point of death on behalf of the guilty. He bears their sin and is numbered among sinners. In doing so, He intercedes on their behalf and satisfies God's plan to reconcile them.

A description of the servant's final exaltation is offered anew. He is counted among the great ones and divides the spoils that accompany greatness. This imagery is meant to convey the restoration of the innocent servant who gives His all so that the guilty may be reconciled to God.

The fact that we are transgressors reminds us that our sins are acts of willful disobedience to a holy God. Christ, however,

stepped in to intercede for transgressors. "The Servant is thus a go-between, interposing between two parties, not as a barrier but as a bridge - the Lord put his Servant in between, using him as a means of disposing of that (our iniquity) which alienated him from us. Here the Servant comes voluntarily to stand with us so that when he had borne our sin he might bring us to God" (Motyer).

Even a cursory knowledge of the events of Christ's final days will quickly lead to the conclusion that Isaiah 53 was written about Him. If we are willing to trust and obey Him, the veil of unbelief will be lifted, and we will see Jesus Christ clearly portrayed throughout the pages of the Old Testament (cf. 2 Cor. 3:13-18).

6. How was Christ "numbered with the transgressors"? (vs. 11,12)

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you honor Jesus for what He has done?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Method and content of your prayers
- Frequency of attending corporate worship
- The way you spend money
- The way you prepare for worship

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. What God is doing in another's life is not always apparent (Isaiah 53:4).
2. Remember that our free salvation was in truth very costly to the Savior (v. 5).
3. Christ bore my personal sin on the cross because I was and am personally a sinner (v. 6).
4. Christ's death was no accident but rather the plan of God (Isa. 53:10; cf. Acts 2:23).
5. Only Jesus' death can satisfy the wrath of God and provide salvation (Isa. 53:11).
6. Rejoice in the fact that Jesus intercedes even now for you (Isa. 53:12; cf. Heb. 7:25).

CONCLUSION

Servant People

For the past four weeks we have studied how God intervened to deliver Israel from Babylonian captivity. We have seen that the Israelites were captive not only to a foreign nation but also to the sin that filled their lives and brought about their punishment. God was faithful to deliver His people from both physical and spiritual bondage.

What is important to note as we wrap up our study of Isaiah is the means God used to liberate His people. The Babylonians had mocked both God and His people, dragging their names through the mud. The Israelites responded by doubting God's power, thinking themselves to be forgotten. Many Israelites undoubtedly embraced the alternative power and religion of Babylon.

God could have responded to these offenses in various ways. He could have imposed His way of thinking on Israel and the nations supernaturally. He could have assembled the heavenly hosts and established His reign with brute force. He could have raised a great warrior-king in Israel to crush Babylon and assert Israel's superiority.

Yet God didn't use any of these strategies. Instead, He told Israel that idol worship was wrong as He used arguments that could be accepted or rejected freely. He claimed that His sovereignty was attested in how He brought His predictions to fruition. God used the foreigner Cyrus to execute judgment against Babylon without overriding Cyrus's own agenda. Finally, God used a gentle servant-leader to form a people to bear witness to His power of reconciliation and new life.

In calling both unfaithful Israel and the faithful servant by the same name – servant - God held before Israel a picture of what He aspired that nation to be. This is evident in what God did next with His people: He returned the Israelites to their land without the perks that were supposed to accompany great nations, and He instructed them to wait for the faithful servant to arrive. That would be a servant who would lead them to greatness as God defined greatness.

When that servant arrived in the person of Jesus, He taught God's people that if they were to be His light to the nations,

then they would have to follow His path of suffering service. He taught them that such service would be a demonstration of God's power and the proper posture of His people in the world. God's strategy has not changed. Christians and churches in our own day must take seriously the servant posture to which God calls us.

PRAYER

Lord God, we thank You for not giving up on us. Though Your people have deserved punishment upon punishment, You spare us the final judgment we deserve. Through the cross of Your Son, Jesus, You have broken the power of sin. For this we thank You and praise You. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Give your life for the servant of God who gave His life for you.