

Fourth Servant Song pt 1 Isaiah 52:13-53:5 bible-sermons.org October 18, 2015

The preceding text looked forward to the captive Jews in Babylon rising up to return to their homeland. It was a promise that they would be delivered. But there are hints in the passage that there is a greater deliverance that is only foreshadowed by that return (Isaiah 52:6, 8). The Babylonian captivity can be a metaphor of our captivity to sin. The coming Redeemer would present Himself, and they were promised to see Him eye to eye. The joy of the ultimate redemption that was coming would far surpass that of the return to Jerusalem.

As with all the Suffering Servant Songs, most Jews today interpret this passage as referring to Israel. Lenny told me that in the Hebrew school he attended the school even deleted the portion of Scripture we will look at today. Before the eleventh century rabbis interpreted the servant in this song as the Messiah. Later rabbis up to this day teach that the suffering servant is the Jewish people. The change came when Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitsak) interpreted the fourth servant song as referring to the Jews. Maimonides (Rambam), who was generally acknowledged to be the greatest Jewish thinker, Talmudist, and codifier in the Middle Ages, wrote that he was shocked by Rashi's change in the interpretation of the Servant in this passage.

There are practical interpretive reasons that the servant in this song can't be Israel. First and most obvious is the fact that in Hebrew the servant is referred to with plural and singular nouns. The singular ones refer to the Messiah and the plural ones refer to the people of Israel. Another key reason is that the servant is referred to as "the arm of the Lord." When one looks at other "arm of the Lord" passages, it is readily seen that this can't be referring to the nation and must be about the Messiah (Isaiah 51:5, 9; 40:10; 52:10). This passage today speaks of an individual person's experience, one who suffers willingly and silently. Can we say that of Israel? He dies for "my people." He is an innocent and righteous sufferer. His death is vicarious and substitutionary, meaning it is for the sake of others and in their place. He suffers for others' justification. He dies and is resurrected. How can those things be applicable to the people of Israel?

¹³ *Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.* Isaiah 52:13 Jesus acted wisely because, Paul wrote, "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:8) "High and lifted up" describes the LORD in Isaiah 6:1 (John 12:38-41). By Isaiah using the same description he used for the LORD, he is saying that the Messiah and the LORD are one. This verse must have been on the Apostle Paul's mind when writing Philippians 2:9-11, for Paul writes that because of Jesus' obedience He was given a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. Jesus wise obedience resulted in exaltation.

¹⁴ *As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—* Isaiah 52:14 I

Commented [PW1]: Isaiah 52:6 (ESV)

⁶ Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am."

Isaiah 52:8 (ESV)

⁸ The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.

Commented [PW2]: Isaiah 51:5 (ESV)

⁵ My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait.

Commented [PW3]: Isaiah 51:9 (ESV)

⁹ Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?

Commented [PW4]: Isaiah 40:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

Commented [PW5]: Isaiah 52:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Commented [PW6]: Philippians 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Commented [PW7]: Isaiah 6:1 (ESV)

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Commented [PW8]: John 12:38-41 (ESV)

³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, ⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."

⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

Commented [PW9]: Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

remember some people telling me that the movie *The Passion* went overboard in its depiction of Jesus' suffering. According to this verse, it may have not gone far enough. He was unrecognizable. The Scriptures mention several different times when Jesus was struck on the face with fists and with a reed. The lashes of the lictors' whips could at times go beyond the back and gash the face of the victim. This verse in Isaiah tells us the Servant was marred beyond human likeness.

Look at the contrast with the previous verse. The song begins saying the Messiah will act with wisdom and be highly exalted. The very next verse says He will be so physically abused He will hardly look human. That doesn't sound very wise. However, the song will go on to explain these great contrasting verses. We'll see the reason for both the suffering and the exaltation.

¹⁵ *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.* Isaiah 52:15 To "sprinkle" is a term used in association with the Levitical law's requirements for purification. When the first covenant between God and Israel was made on Sinai, Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the covenant (Exodus 24:8). The language of this verse implies that God is going to enter a new covenant, but not with the blood of animals, but with the blood of His Servant, not with Israel alone, but with many nations (Hebrews 12:22-24; Isaiah 49:6). Jesus clearly understood this. During the Last Supper He declared the communion cup was the cup of the New Covenant in His blood (1Corinthians 11:25).

Kings will shut their mouths is referring to a sign of respect. They will want to hear from Messiah. The Apostle Paul cited the end of this verse in Romans 15:21 in application to the spread of the Gospel to Gentile nations. Perhaps this is ultimately referring to the Millennial Kingdom when kings will come to New Jerusalem to listen to the King of kings, to learn what had never before been told them.

Again, consider the contrast and message this is declaring. The wisdom of the Servant will result in Him being brutally abused, but end in Him entering into a covenant with nations and being exalted above kings. How can that be?

¹ *Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?* Isaiah 53:1 This verse is why we can say the Servant is "the arm of the LORD." The song continues with a revelation of "the arm of the LORD." The song is asking who has believed the prophecies. The Jews did not believe the words of Isaiah. They carried on with their idolatry until they went into captivity. Did they believe God would raise up a Gentile king to deliver them? Did they believe that if they returned God would protect them? It seems only remnant did. Did they believe the Messiah was coming to suffer and die for them? Apparently not.

Commented [PW10]: Exodus 24:8 (ESV)

⁸ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Commented [PW11]: Hebrews 12:22-24 (ESV)

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,
²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,
²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Commented [PW12]: Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Commented [PW13]: 1 Corinthians 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Commented [PW14]: Romans 15:21 (ESV)

²¹ but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Then the song asks who has received a revelation of "the arm of the LORD." Jesus tells us that we can only come to Him if the Father draws us (John 6:44). While many were curious about Jesus and the miracles He performed, after the resurrection there were only 500 followers (1 Corinthians 15:6). It took the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost for multitudes to receive the revelation. This song, however, goes on to explain why many did not recognize Him.

² 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. Isaiah 53:2 Spiritually barren Israel was burdened with stifling oral traditions and a seemingly endless cycle of religious requirements that were impossible to live out. Many just gave up trying and were referred to as "sinners." In that dry ground came this new shoot of life growing in their midst (Isaiah 11:1). As Isaiah prophesied, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given" (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus wasn't a handsome, attractive person, but His words were a breath of fresh air.

³ 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. Isaiah 53:3 John tells us that Jesus came unto His own and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). The leaders rejected Him because He did not conform to their traditions and interpretations. They were so intimidated by Him that they decided they had to eliminate Him. After the crucifixion, the Jewish writings about Jesus even changed His name to derogatory words. The only leaders who first esteemed Jesus were Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38-40). They surely lost their high positions to align themselves with a man who was accused of blasphemy and crucified.

The people weren't any more receptive. While He miraculously fed and healed them, they were eager to be around Him. But when He refused to be their king or do their bidding, they used His difficult expressions to justify turning away (John 6:66).

It is no different today. I'm always struck with the Bible's accurate depiction of human nature. Billy Graham just published a new book in anticipation of his own death entitled, *Where I Am*. It speaks of heaven and hell and the choice we must make. Liberals are furious about the focus on hell and have made all kinds of claims. They say Franklin wrote it under his father's name, that Billy never emphasized that message, or that it was written like this because his mind is failing, and on and on. Why? They hate the message of impending judgment. They reject the message that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. **The real Jesus and His honest messengers will always be despised and rejected by men because they speak of man's fallen condition (2 Timothy 3:12).**

Jesus is said to be more joyful than His brothers, that is, those who are His followers (Hebrews 1:9). Yet, here He is called a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Jesus faced the rejection of His family, His friends and community, His followers, even

Commented [PW15]: John 6:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Commented [PW16]: 1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)

⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Commented [PW17]: Isaiah 11:1 (ESV)

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Commented [PW18]: Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Commented [PW19]: John 1:11 (ESV)

¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

Commented [PW20]: John 19:38-40 (ESV)

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body.

³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

Commented [PW21]: John 6:66 (ESV)

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Commented [PW22]: 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Commented [PW23]: Hebrews 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

His nation. The accusations against Him ranged from accusing Him of being deranged to being demon possessed (John 10:20). Jesus knew grief and sorrow. He was probably most sorrowful for all who would not hear His invitation and warnings. When those you love ignore your pleas to turn from a disastrous direction, it can be very grievous to your soul. Yet, He found His joy in His fellowship with the Father and doing the Father's will. Sorrow does not exclude joy, nor does joy exclude grief.

The verse ends declaring "we esteemed Him not." Jesus fellow Jews rejected Him. Yet, remember verses 13 and 15 in the opening of the song declare He will be esteemed. Jesus was esteemed by the Father for His obedience, and He would be esteemed by His followers after the resurrection and ascension. The world will esteem Him when He reigns over the Millennial Kingdom, at least until the final uprising against Him (Revelation 20:7-9). The redeemed will highly esteem Him throughout eternity.

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. Isaiah 53:4 The word translated "borne" here is used in Leviticus to describe the scapegoat carrying away the sins of the nation into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:22). Our griefs come from sin in our lives and in the lives of others. Jesus carried all those sins, the source of our grief and sorrow, to the cross.

The enemy of our souls tries to tell us we are missing out on happiness when we say, "no!" to sin. Yes, we are missing out on much of the grief and sorrow sin causes. We may miss some temporal pleasure, but the accompanying grief is never worth it. What an entirely opposite perspective presented to us by the Word and by that of Satan!

Jesus carried our sorrows. The same word "carry" was used in 46:4 to tell us how God carries us through life to our old age. Life is filled with sorrows. We've had our share lately, but God is carrying us through it. He carries our sorrows. **Just as we can cast our cares on Him, we can cast our sorrows on Him as well.** Let that sink in. You can't carry them alone. He will carry away your grief like the scapegoat carried away the sins of the nation. If He is willing to carry your sorrow, why should you go on carrying it? It may take time to release it into His hands, but know His hands are stretched out to receive all our sorrows. Will you dare to believe that? He gives you His word.

Matthew tells us that what Jesus carried away is the consequences of sin as well, namely illness. When Jesus healed Peter's mother and the sick and demon possessed of Capernaum, Matthew said it was a fulfillment of this verse (Matthew 8:16-17). He quotes the verse as, "He took our illnesses and diseases" in place of "grief and sorrow."

In spite of so graciously bearing our sins and carrying our sorrows, we count Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. Stricken is a Hebrew verb usually associated with disease, but in this case it is the disease of our sins. That isn't what He deserved. It was what we deserved. He deserves our love and gratitude. He deserves our total allegiance, honor, and praise. Why should God smite Him?

Commented [PW24]: John 10:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?"

Commented [PW25]: Revelation 20:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison
⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.
⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

Commented [PW26]: Leviticus 16:22 (ESV)

²² The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

Commented [PW27]: Isaiah 46:4 (ESV)

⁴ even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

Commented [PW28]: Matthew 8:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

⁵ 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.

Isaiah 53:5 He was pierced for our transgressions, not His own (Psalm 22:16). Pierced is a word that survives in Arabic to mean fatally thrust through. Jesus' hands, feet, and side were pierced for your transgressions and mine.

He was crushed for our iniquities. "Crushed" reminds us of the opening verses that say His form was marred beyond human likeness. The just punishment our sins deserve fell upon Jesus, but that brings us peace. We don't have to stand before God and give an account of our rebellion. As the Apostle Paul declared, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1b).

"And with His wounds we are healed." This is often cited by people seeking divine healing. Peter cited it in 1 Peter 2:24. *²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.* Peter's use of the verse is in context with the Servant Song. The healing referred to here is the healing of our sin sick souls. I believe God sometimes answers our prayers for miraculous healing, but this is not the verse that refers to it. It is one of those verses regularly used out of context because, generally speaking, we don't examine the context and try to apply verses as the Scriptures do. Matthew's use of verse four is more applicable to physical healing.

Ray Ortlund Jr. summed up the message of this song in words that are easier for us to relate to than these that are steeped in Jewish traditions. He wrote, "God wants to glorify himself by flooding our lives with sin-bearing mercy in Christ. The only barrier to being awash in freshness and joy and release is when we cling to our guilt by clinging to our own righteousness. **All our guilt must go to Christ, and all our righteousness must come from Christ.** This is God's way of release for guilty people, and there is no other." That is the truth, the Good News! Lord willing, we will conclude the song next week.

Questions

- 1 What does the Babylonian captivity picture?
- 2 When did the Jews change the interpretation of the song?
- 3 Why should we think the Servant is Jesus?
- 4 What is the big contrast in 52:13-15?
- 5 Why is Jesus despised?
- 6 What were some of Jesus' sorrows?
- 7 What has and will He do for us?
- 8 What is behind the words "stricken" and "borne"?
- 9 Why was He pierced?
- 10 What wounds does He heal?

Commented [PW29]: Psalm 22:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—

Commented [PW30]: Romans 5:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW31]: R. Ortlund Jr. Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.