

Isaiah 53

July 28, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Session Outline

1. The Plan for Salvation (Isaiah 52:13-15)
2. The Suffering (Isaiah 53:1-9)
3. The Victory (Isaiah 53:10-12)

Theological Theme

Isaiah prophesied about the suffering and death of the Messiah as God's means of reconciling sinful humans to Himself. Although Isaiah wrote about the cross hundreds of years before it happened, every detail was accurate and fulfilled just as he foresaw.

Call to Action

Reflect on the central truths of the gospel—from Isaiah 53 and with the Lord's Supper. Families, groups, and so on, make an intentional effort to process implications. Pray for particular people who need to hear the gospel and for opportunities to share with them.



Leader Guide

Isaiah 53

Introduction

When was the last time you moved? It can be tough to find people with trucks and a willingness to give up their time, energy, and efforts to get your furniture and possessions transferred from one place to another. There may have also been times you have dodged a phone call from a friend because you didn't want to face the pressure of saying yes or no to helping them move.

Bearing or caring for someone else's stuff is not something most people line up to volunteer for, even if it's a close friend. This ordinary example is a reminder of the way our attitude and actions often stand in contrast to Jesus. Today, we look at a passage of Scripture that describes the way Jesus willingly took on the burden of sin for the entire world. He became our substitutionary sacrifice by taking the punishment we deserve and accomplishing on our behalf that which we could never do for ourselves.

- ❓ What are some reasons most people aren't excited to help someone else move?
- ❓ What are some other ways we may be unwilling to carry the burdens of others?


Session Summary

Isaiah foretold of the ultimate sacrifice the Messiah would suffer through as He bore the burdens and sorrows of His people. He willingly endured injustice and terrible beatings instead of seeking His own deserved comfort. Jesus became the final and ultimate sacrifice once for all for the sins of the world.

Jesus fulfilled every detail of the prophecy Isaiah wrote hundreds of years earlier. Though the suffering Jesus went through was awful, it pleased God because it was the only way for sinful people to be reconciled to Him. Jesus provided the only way for us to be in right relationship with God and be forgiven of our sins. Once we trust in Him and are saved by faith in Jesus, we are to share the truth with those around us, so that they too can receive the gift of Jesus on the cross.


1. The Plan for Salvation (Isaiah 52:13-15)

Today's passage is a direct reference to the coming Messiah. Isaiah's words pointed forward to the events surrounding Jesus's death. This is the same passage that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading in his chariot when he asked Philip who the author was talking about. These are powerful words that carry great weight even though they were written hundreds of years before Jesus's arrival in human form.

 What description of Jesus stands out to you from these last three verses of Isaiah 52?


God has always had a plan to provide a way of salvation for His people. God promised that the Messiah would be exalted and lifted high. He would triumph over the enemy and win the ultimate battle. It is noteworthy that the description of Jesus starts with His victory before describing the way in which this victory would be achieved.

Nothing that happened to Jesus came as a surprise to God. He has always had a plan for the salvation of the people that He created and loves.

 What is significant about starting from a place of Jesus's victory? How does this apply to our daily lives?

Once sin entered the world, man and woman were separated from God because He is holy and pure (Genesis 3). After their sin, God sacrificed an animal because innocent blood is necessary for the forgiveness of sin. The sacrificial system continued for centuries until the coming of Jesus. Isaiah wrote about the cruel, vicious, and shocking beating that Jesus endured as the final sacrifice for the sins of God's people. Jesus's innocent blood was necessary to reconcile us, as sinful people, with our holy God.

Isaiah said the Messiah would sprinkle many nations. Sprinkling was often associated with cleansing from and forgiveness of sin in the Old Testament. Isaiah proclaimed that the work of the Messiah would bring cleansing to the nations. Although the plan originated with Israel, it has always been intended for all nations and not just limited to the nation of Israel. Jesus would bring healing and forgiveness to nations far beyond Israel and literally across the world.

 Application: How have you experienced the restoration that comes through faith in Christ?

Isaiah 40–66


This final section of the book begins on an extremely positive note, as God affirmed His commitment to His servant nation and promised them deliverance from exile in seemingly unconditional terms. As the section progresses, it becomes apparent that total restoration would not be automatic. Covenantal renewal, mediated through a special servant viewed as an ideal Israel and a second Moses, was necessary. Anticipating that some would reject God's offer of reconciliation, the book's final chapters foresee a final, purifying judgment, out of which a holy community would emerge.

2. The Suffering (Isaiah 53:1-9)


This chapter foretells in detail the suffering Jesus would endure and the way He would eventually die. The Messiah would suffer greatly to cleanse the nations. How would deep and painful suffering bring about cleansing? It is easy for us to see the redemption brought about through the cross today, but this would not have been as clear a picture of Isaiah's original audience. Much of the descriptive language feels contradictory on the surface.

The mighty arm of the Lord alludes to power and strength, an idea at odds with a picture of a weak person who has been beaten within an inch of His life. This is a reminder that Jesus had access to all the power of God and yet He willingly submitted to the worst type of physical punishment and gave up His life for those He loves. Jesus displayed strength in His suffering like the world had never seen.

The dry ground that the root of Jesse grew from reminds us that no person, area, or country is too dry to be changed by the Living Water. When we feel like it might be hopeless to bring the gospel to a person or place, this passage encourages us there is no place so dry that the power of Jesus can't make a difference.


-  When have you felt like someone or some place was “too dry” to receive the gospel? How does the image of the suffering servant remind you that nothing is impossible for God?

This man of sorrows would have nothing in His physical appearance to draw people to Him. God is more concerned with the inside of a person than the outside. This concept is counter cultural to the world we live in as it was in that day also. Jesus would be despised and rejected which we read about in the gospels. This rejection advanced to the point of Jesus dying at the hands of sinful people, which He did willingly for their sake and ours.

-  What aspects of this description of Jesus can you connect to the events that took place near the end of His life? How does the fulfillment of this prophecy help bolster your faith?

These verses include some of the most well-known and poignant descriptors of what Jesus did for us. All the things Jesus dealt with and endured were so that we could be free. He chose the path of the cross to take our place and relieve us of the weight of our sin. He willingly laid down His life without a word in His own defense for the glory of God.


Jesus was in control the entire time that He was beaten, tried, and then hung on the cross with criminals. He became our ultimate innocent sacrificial lamb to fulfill the plan of the Lord and provide us a way to complete forgiveness.

 Application: How is God calling you to respond to what Jesus has done for you?

3. The Victory (Isaiah 53:10-12)


Following the harrowing description of the Messiah's suffering, Isaiah reminds us this was God's will. Some translations use the word "pleased" to describe God's posture toward these events. This reminds us Jesus was not a victim of circumstances: He was the key figure in this plan ordained by God and prophesied by Isaiah hundreds of years before it happened. This was a victory for the Lord despite how it looked in human terms.

To hear that "the Lord was pleased to crush [the servant] severely" (53:10) sounds extremely harsh. The Hebrew verb rendered "was pleased" can also mean "to desire" or "to will" something. God's "pleasure" in this context refers to His will or plan—not a sadistic pleasure derived from inflicting pain on an innocent victim. God's plan was for His servant's suffering and death to qualify as a guilt offering—a pure and holy sacrifice offered for the forgiveness of sinners (see Leviticus 5:14-15; Hebrews 9:24-28).

 How is it possible that God could be pleased with what would happen to Jesus?

The Lord would be pleased because the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross enabled the world to be reconciled to the Father. Jesus's love for us brought Him willingly to the place we deserve because of our sin. Jesus bore the burden of our sin even though He was completely innocent.

Gloriously, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was not the end of the story. Jesus is alive and lives to see His people live prosperously in relationship with God because of His sacrifice. Jesus delights in the reality that mankind has been reconciled to Him.

 How do we receive the work of Jesus on our behalf?

Jesus did the work for us, but we must surrender our lives to Him to receive the fullness of what He's done and live in the freedom of Christ. Only those who receive the finished work of Christ on their behalf are reconciled to the Father. Otherwise, Jesus's sacrifice has no effect for you.

Using imagery of dividing the spoils after a military victory, Isaiah described the great reward of Jesus—those He secures by His finished work. It is Jesus’s delight to restore His people to the Father and the reward of His finished work is reconciled relationship between God and man. Sadly, many are content to settle for much less. But we are reminded that Jesus has been obedient where we have been rebels; He has been perfect where we have been sinful; and He has interceded for us in the places we were disobedient and powerless.

Many Christian scholars understand verses 11-12 to foreshadow Christ’s resurrection and exaltation. Paul described Christ’s exaltation in this way in Philippians 2:9-11: “For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Now, we are called to share this amazing news with others, inviting them to receive the work of Jesus for themselves and be reconciled into right relationship with God the Father.



Application: Who can you tell about the finished work of Jesus on their behalf?

Conclusion

Jesus lived a perfect life without sin. Yet because of His great love for us and the plan of the Father to reconcile sinful man to Himself, Jesus willingly endured terrible suffering and gave up His life on the cross in our place. He took on the burden of our sin and died as our substitutionary sacrifice once for all.

Isaiah prophesied in detail about all Jesus would go through hundreds of years before it occurred. Then Jesus came and fulfilled the prophecy down to the last detail. He was victorious over sin and death and continues to make intercession on our behalf.



How are you impacted to revisit the details of Jesus’s sacrifice on your behalf?



How can we as a group remind one another of these truths on a regular basis?



How can you seek a gospel conversation with another person by sharing the message of Isaiah 53 with them?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for His plan to save sinful people, including you. Thank Jesus for being a willing sacrifice and taking your place so you can be reconciled to Him. Ask for courage to share with others who need to be freed from their sin.

Memory Verse

But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. —Isaiah 53:5

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Isaiah* by Andrew Davis
- *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Isaiah* by Trent Butler
- *Be Comforted* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Isaiah

Purpose

Isaiah's message is relatively simple. First, Isaiah accused God's people of sin: rebelling against the one who made them and redeemed them. Second, Isaiah instructed these sinners to reform their ways and act obediently. Third, Isaiah announced God's judgment on the people because of their sin. Finally, God revealed his future restoration of the people, or at least of the faithful remnant that survived the judgment. As part of the restoration of God's people, Isaiah foresaw both judgment on the nations (chaps. 13–23) and a future turning of the nations to God (2:1–4). The first part of the book (chaps. 1–39) emphasizes sin, the call to repentance, and judgment; the second part (chaps. 40–66) emphasizes the hope of restoration.

Author

The book presents itself as the writing of one man, Isaiah son of Amoz. The superscription to the book dates his prophetic activity as spanning the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah (783–742 BC, Isaiah's call is dated to this king's last year, 6:1); Jotham (742–735 BC); Ahaz (735–716 BC); and Hezekiah (716–686 BC). On Uzziah (Azariah) see 2Kg 15:1–7; 2Ch 26:1–23. On Jotham see Kg 15:32–38; 2Ch 27:1–9. On Ahaz see 2Kg 16:1–20; 2Ch 28:1–27. On Hezekiah see 2Kg 18:1–20:21; 2Ch 29:1–32:33. Not much is known about Isaiah apart from his prophecy.

Setting

Uzziah's reign was a particularly prosperous time in the history of Judah, but storm clouds were on the horizon. Assyria was on the rise again in the person of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC). The Assyrian king threatened to engulf Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel. After the death of Tiglath-pileser, his successors, Shalmaneser and Sargon, defeated the northern kingdom in 722 BC and deported its citizens. This event brought Judah even more under the shadow of that great empire. Isaiah 37:38 suggests that the prophet lived until the death of Sennacherib in 681 BC.

Special Features

Isaiah was an eighth-century BC prophet. His book is the first of the Prophets in the English canon and the first of the Latter Prophets in the Hebrew canon. Isaiah is powerful in its poetic imagination, intriguing in its prophetic vision, and complex in its structure. One can never read or study the book without gaining new insights into the nature of God and our relationship with him. The authors of the New Testament read the book of Isaiah in light of the coming of Christ and realized that this prophet anticipated Messiah's coming with remarkable clarity. For this reason they quoted or alluded to Isaiah more than any other Old Testament book.

Extended Commentary

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

52:13–53:12 The NT authors recognized that the description of a suffering servant, who “bore the sin of many” (53:12), fits Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the sins of his people. This chapter’s description is the most individualistic of all the servant songs in the book of Isaiah, and thus most clearly points to application beyond Israel.

52:13 The poem begins with the end point—the exaltation of the servant (53:11–12). Glory will be the end result of his suffering.

52:14 The suffering of the servant will so disfigure him that he will not appear human.

52:15 Much debate surrounds the meaning of the servant sprinkling many nations. The main problem is that the verse does not specify what the servant will use to sprinkle them. The best guess is that it refers to a ritual act like the sprinkling of blood (Lv 4:6, 17; 16:14–15, 19; Nm 19:4) or oil (Lv 8:11). The effect of this sprinkling is either to purify or to dedicate to a holy status. Paul quotes this verse in Rm 15:21.

53:1 The speakers of these verses (we) are likely the prophet and the community that he represents. The arm of the Lord refers to his victorious power, ironically revealed through a suffering servant. This verse is quoted in Jn 12:38 and Rm 10:16.

53:2–3 A young plant growing up in dry ground would be withered, thus providing an appropriate image of the man of suffering. Just like a withered plant is uprooted and thrown away, so the suffering servant was rejected by men.

53:4–6 For the first time the reader learns that the servant suffered on behalf of others. Even so, people did not recognize it, and he was rejected as one struck down by God for his own supposed sins. Verse 4 is quoted in Mt 8:17.

53:7 Though not suffering for his own sins, the servant suffered silently and willingly. Philip used this passage to tell the Ethiopian eunuch the good news about Jesus, who silently bore his crucifixion (Ac 8:31–35; 1Pt 2:22–23).

53:8 For the first time the passage reveals that the servant’s suffering culminated in death.

53:9 The servant died unjustly and was buried as if he were an evil man. The pairing of the wicked with the rich man implies that the wealthy man got his riches by deceit. This may be confirmed by the final statement of the verse that the servant had not spoken deceitfully. Jesus was literally buried by a rich man when he was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Mt 27:57–60).

53:10–11 That God was pleased to crush the servant sounds mean-spirited, but his pleasure is explained by the fact that the servant’s suffering will justify many. What seems harsh will turn out to be gracious. The servant’s pain, suffering, and death will function like a restitution offering (Lv 5:14–6:7; 7:1–10)—a sacrifice offered when there was a “transgression against the sacred things

of the Lord” (Tremper Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*). The sin of God’s people was such a transgression.

53:12 Returning to the theme at the beginning of the poem (52:13), the suffering of the servant will give way to his exaltation. Jesus’s suffering culminated in the crucifixion but gave way to the resurrection. This verse is quoted in Lk 22:37.¹

References

1. Tremper Longman III, “Isaiah,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).