

### Isaiah 52:13-15 (NKJV)

**<sup>13</sup> Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.**

**<sup>14</sup> Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men;**

**<sup>15</sup> So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.**

We are headed toward Isaiah 53. It is the Old Testament revelation of the controversial role and method of the Messiah. It is the insight into how God will rescue His creation. And, as such, we need preparation for it. We need a drum roll. We need to grasp the urgency. That is what we will use this morning for. Our text is preparing us for what is to come.

Have you ever considered that the things you take pride in have very little to do with anything that came from you? As a husband and father I take some pride in the fact that I have always provided for my family. Yet if I had been born in parts of Africa, being the very same person that I am, I would have had to watch my children starve. God simply provided me better circumstances. Maybe we take pride in the lives we have built, as if we built them with our own hands. But all of us can easily imagine ways in which we would have destroyed those lives if we were given different temptations or opportunities. Maybe we pride ourselves with how hard we work. But a single germ entering our bodies could end all of this. Do you see what I mean? It is nearly impossible for us to not believe the lies that our pride pumps out minute by minute about our specialness, about our wonderfulness, about our superiority to those we compare ourselves to. It is in us all the time. It is at the heart of flesh.

Now the people of Israel have shown signs of this same problem throughout their whole history. They are always taking credit for being God's chosen people. Think about that a little. Scripture goes out of its way to say that Abraham was **nothing special**. The only thing that was special about Abraham was not about Abraham. It was about God. God chose him, out of all the others, to be the father of His people. Right from the start we see that there is no reason **for pride** in the chosen people of God. They can be proud of **their God**. But there is no reason for them to be proud **of themselves**. But what do they do? They show generation after generation that they think themselves better than everyone else.

Why? Because they are the people of God. They become self righteous, arrogant, boastful, and think themselves superior to all others. Why? Because of something they had nothing to do with. None of them chose their parents. None chose their lineage. It was **done to them** without any decision making at all. So why are they proud? Because that is what oozes out of sinful people. That is what always happens with humans when they are unrestrained by the truth. So we have the God's chosen people awaiting their Messiah. And what do they think the Messiah will do? Well they think the Messiah will do **what they would do** if they were the Messiah. He will come and destroy every non Jew that ever mocked Him. He will destroy all those who have opposed His people. And He will set up a throne with a heavy hand to let the world know that the Jews, after all, are God's only special people. We can understand their mistake. There are lots of prophecies that say something like this. But in all their years of **studying God and quoting God**, they show that they still **do not know their God or themselves**. And what is the real problem? What is the real obstacle? What is the thing that damns all humans and only God can take care of?

The problem is guilt. The problem is guilt.

I read something by brother Ortland that I knew when I read it that I had to share it with you all. It explains so much of the trouble we have in our relationships. It explains the trouble we have with ourselves. And my guess is that most of us have only done a fraction of the business we should do with the truth he reveals.

This is what he says:

**Every one of us is ungodly, and we know it. We've failed to be the people we ought to be. A deep unease about ourselves is why we live in denial. When we discover self-excusing evasion in our politicians, for example, we demand an honest reckoning. But do we require the same unsparing honesty of ourselves? Isn't cover-up the self-righteous strategy of every guilty conscience? Isn't that why we blame others? Finger-pointing is one of our favorite devices for self-justification. And what lies behind that but our own troubled conscience? We may dismiss those feelings as mere social conditioning or our culture's arbitrary invention of right and wrong or our parents' neuroses imposed on us in our youth. But the next time you have a fight with your spouse or roommate or whoever, ask yourself this: Why are you so fiercely passionate to be found *right*? Isn't it because you're not sure you really are? Isn't it because you need to reassure yourself?**

**There's a reason why we shift the blame. There's a reason why our problems are always someone else's fault. There's a reason why parents blame their children and husbands blame wives and so forth. The reason we continually pass the buck is that we know we can't bear our own guilt. We want so desperately for others to bear it for us. So we dump it on them, without even noticing what's happening in our thoughts. This is a major source of tension in our homes and workplaces and churches.**

*Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

Isn't that insightful? A person who tells the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about themselves is very rare. We all prefer our theories about ourselves over the truth about ourselves. We want to see ourselves as being a certain kind of person. Yet often the simple facts about us show us to be quite different.

For example, we might want to see ourselves as wanting to follow and serve God. We might see ourselves as being very dedicated to God. Yet our clocks show we dedicate very little of our time in doing the things most central to God's will.

What do we believe about ourselves? Our good intentions.

We might want to believe we care deeply about the plight of other believers in harms way. We might see ourselves as being very caring, very concerned, very involved. But where does our money go? To our own pleasures and comforts.

What do we believe about ourselves? Our caring sentiments.

We might want to view ourselves as people who love God, we are just hungry to follow God, who are excited about serving God, only wanting to do what He says.

But in the questionable areas of our lives, those areas where we have a sneaky feeling "I should not be doing this", we do next to nothing to find out what God wants, even though Bibles and believers are all around us. And what do we believe about ourselves? Our optimistic theories about ourselves.

When I say that our hearts are the trickiest people we know, I like to think that is true OF YOU. And when you believe that statement, you are probably most prone to believe it OF ME. But it is really true of all of us.

Why are we so slippery? Why are we so self deceptive? It is because our pride and our admission of guilt are mutually exclusive. They are darkness and light. And when we relax, pride wins. Pride is our default setting. We can be proud with no extra effort. Humility takes extra steps. Humility requires us to look at ourselves critically. Humility requires us to go where the facts go. Humility

requires us to risk seeing things we don't like. It is harder. When we kick into default mode, darkness wins. And it is a rare human being who really is willing to go where the truth goes, where the evidence goes, no matter where that might take them. It is a rare human being who loves light that much, who loves Jesus that much. Yet that is what we are called to. We are to know the truth about Jesus and about ourselves, and that truth will set us free. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Jesus Christ came to do business with our guilt. He came to seek and to save those who were guilty. That is what the Jewish people, as a whole, were not willing to grant. They didn't see themselves as needing **that kind** of Savior. So they were not prepared for Jesus. They were not prepared for a suffering servant. They were not prepared for the **lamb of God** to be sacrificed for their sins.

What are we prepared for? If someone challenges something we are doing, what do they see from us? Do they see pride, as we do our best to get them off the track? Or do they see us search our souls to see if we truly are the guilty party? Are we accustomed to saying, "I was wrong"? Are we accustomed to saying, "Please forgive me"? Really, in your closest relationships? When is the last time you confessed that the fault was all yours? And you did it, not to make the conflict go away. There is no virtue in falsely taking the blame to resolve conflict. That kind of response is not a display of humility. It is not loving or peacemaking. It is actually cowardly. And it is just a deception that keeps the guilty party ignorant or unrepentant of their wrong.

But to admit guilt because we know it to be true from where God sits, that is how Christians are to relate. Good theology has to hit where we live. Good theology has to have us looking at ourselves suspiciously as the **likely** guilty party. Because there is a very good chance that **we are**. How would your relationships improve if you were to respond when someone makes a criticism of you by saying, "Let me think and pray about that"? "Let me see if I can determine if that is true about me". "I promise I will get back to you on this." Maybe people would quit trying to get through to us if they were actually successful, if we actually did business with what they see.

And do you know what the ultimate beautiful truth continually resides in the background of our lives? No matter what horrible thing we discover about ourselves and are forced to admit, no matter what sinful motive is seen because we were brave enough to do business with the facts, no matter what painful fact

about us comes to light, we have been proclaimed by God, **not guilty**. Christ has already **paid** for our pride, and covetousness, and envy, and lust, and deception, and selfishness and every other ugly thing that may pop up. That is **why** we are free to do real business with it. That is why we do not need to be afraid of what we will find. **We** do not have to hide from our guilt because **Christ** did not hide from our guilt. He took it upon Himself and now we are legally free of it.

We as human beings need free of the **power of sin** over our hearts and the **condemnation of sin** over our records. We need to be new people now who live with the reality of what we **were then** and **are now**. And instead of running from guilt, we need to freely admit it and repent of the sin. We are getting ready to learn about our wonderful Savior who will meet our need of forgiveness in a way that very few saw coming.

<sup>13</sup> **Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.**

Carla and I re-did our basement bathroom. We were trying to replace our sink with another kind. First we bought a vanity that would not work because of the way the plumbing was run. I was going to change the plumbing but realized if I made a mistake we would have to wait for a plumber to come before we would have any running water. Then we bought another kind of sink that did work, but it required some jerry rigging. Finally we got it all to work. This is a very good description of the opposite of the word used in verse 13 for **prudently**. The word **prudently** means that the thing being done is being done with much wisdom, much expertise, much skill, and whatever is done is done in such a way that it is sure to be successful.

So we see the announcement that God's servant, who according to the context **must be Christ**, acts in a skillful knowledgeable way that is sure to meet with success.

Now think about this. Had Christ asked 1000 people what He should do to save His people, what answers do you think he would have received? No one would have suggested to come in poverty as an apparent illegitimate child, to live in obscurity for 30 years. Then preach and teach and do miracles, saying all the time that you must die. And then to walk right into the hands of the Jewish leaders so they could kill you. And then die an agonizing death on the cross. No self respecting Jewish person, or any human being for that matter, would have suggested this. And there lies the difference between those who **think they know**

and He **who really does**. Jesus plan was Prudent. It was perfectly wise and it was going to work perfectly. And His is the only plan that ever will. There will never be a world religion that will compete with Christianity. There is simply nothing like it because there is no one like Christ.

**He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.**

Now, when we read the scriptures and we see how Christ was treated, we might be tempted to **pity Christ**. We might be tempted to say, “oh poor poor Jesus. You were such a victim. You were so good and you were treated so bad. How could that have happened to you?” But if we were to take that view we would be wrong. Christ dying for our sins was not **an accident**. It was **a strategy**. We read in Hebrews that Christ did it for the joy that was set before Him. It was a **prudently** chosen plan that will earn eternal praise in glory from all of the redeemed humans. It has earned praise from His Father who was well pleased with Christ and Christ now sits at the right hand of God.

The path to glory does not always look very glorified. The path to the greatest service for God is often one of humility. Look at Moses- 40 years tending sheep. Look at Joseph- jail time. God has a funny way of showing who He likes. But we can always know that **doing things God’s way** is always the path to glory. It is always the **best** way. It is always the way that pays off the best in the long run.

<sup>14</sup> **Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men;**

Now how does this prudent Savior that is headed for glory, how does He look? He looks like a tortured human being. The Jewish readers would have been stumped by this. How can our King look like the most tortured person on the planet? The word for astonished is pretty strong. It means to stun, to devastate, to stupefy. The onlookers are completely taken back. They are knocked off stride. This is nothing they could have compared themselves for. Here is their King. And His face shows signs of **nothing but agony**. This may not mean that he was **disfigured** more than any man as much as His face showed the **signs of his abuse** more than any man. It could be the mixture of His external torture and the internal torture that showed itself on His face that made him worse than anyone else.

Anyone looking on would not have clung much to the question, is this **our King?** They would have been distracted to the point that they were asking, **is this thing a human?** The agony would have been that severe.

No one could expect this. None of the seminaries at the time would have gotten this correct. It would have fit no one's theories or theologies. No one had a box for God that would have fit something like this. But here it is, none the less. The prudent savior looks like a mangled mess of flesh. How could this be from God?

**<sup>15</sup> So shall He sprinkle many nations.**

When the Jewish people would hear the word "sprinkle" they would immediately think of blood being sprinkled in conjunction with the processes done to get one's sins covered.

**Exodus 29:20-21 (NKJV)**

**<sup>20</sup> Then you shall kill the ram, and take some of its blood and put *it* on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tip of the right ear of his sons, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar.**

**<sup>21</sup> And you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle *it* on Aaron and on his garments, on his sons and on the garments of his sons with him; and he and his garments shall be hallowed, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.**

**Leviticus 16:14-16 (NKJV)**

**<sup>14</sup> He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the mercy seat on the east *side*; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.**

**<sup>15</sup> "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which *is* for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat.**

**<sup>16</sup> So he shall make atonement for the Holy *Place*, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.**

The sprinkling is done in the high priestly act. It has to do with the covering of sins. The blood is needed to consecrate things because of sin.

Now the work **that Christ is going to do** is going to forgive sin and not just in the temple. His work will go far beyond a single piece of real estate. His sprinkling will save people throughout the world. Christ's blood atonement will rescue everyone who calls upon Him in faith. It is far superior to the old testament

sacrifices that could not remove sin. It could only **cover sin**. Christ's perfect sacrifice can completely remove the penalty of our sin.

**Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.**

Isn't it interesting how people respond to Christ. The Jewish leaders were not at all silent before Christ. They did not have the good sense to understand the greatness that they were facing. They interpreted his disfigurement at their hands as a sign of failure, as a sign of weakness. They did not grasp His great purpose. They did not know that He was the only one qualified to sprinkle the purifying blood to cleanse us from our sins.

But those who were completely ignorant of the God of the Jews find themselves silent in His presence. They recognize the royalty and the specialness of Christ. Remember in the Gospels how Gentile big shots would come to Christ and they would display great respect to Him. They knew He was different. They knew He was special.

We know how to apply this 15<sup>th</sup> verse because we know how Paul applied it.

**Romans 15:20-21 (NKJV)**

**<sup>20</sup> And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,**

**<sup>21</sup> but as it is written: "*To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.*"**

Paul believed this verse was referring to the Gentiles. Paul believed it referred to those who did not know about God. And Paul did the very thing this talked about. Paul presented the Gospel of Christ to Kings. And sometimes it had a profound effect, even if it did not convince them to follow Christ.

We have finished with today's text, but in anticipation for next weeks text I wanted to read this. I think you will find it interesting.

**How Do Orthodox Jews Read Isaiah 53? Layton Talbert**

***We usually think of Isaiah 53 as a unit; from a structural and literary standpoint, however, the passage actually runs from 52:13 to 53:12. The significance of those boundaries will become apparent shortly.***

**My good friend, Craig Hartman (director of [Shalom Ministries](#)), describes an approach he likes to use with Orthodox Jews. He asks if he can get their opinion**



on a Bible passage. Then he begins to read from Isaiah 53. Inevitably, he says, they will try to peer over the edge of the Bible to see what he's reading. When they do that, he holds up the binding towards them so they can see that it's a Christian Bible (Old and New Testament). That satisfies their curiosity, so he continues reading. As he reads more and more of the passage, they always (that's not my exaggeration, that's Craig's word—*always*) end up saying something like this: "Oh, that's talking about your Jesus." At that point he holds the open text out in front of them so they can see exactly where he was reading—their Isaiah 53. Reactions vary, but pleasant surprise is not one of them.

The point? The picture of Christ on the cross in Isaiah 53 is immediately apparent even to an Orthodox Jew who simply hears it being read. So why don't they believe?

You cannot see what you will not look at.

There are lots of reasons. But the most theologically rooted explanation is offered by Paul (a Jew) when he writes that "blindness in part has happened to Israel" (Rom. 11:25) with the result that "a veil lies over their heart" when they read the Old Testament (2 Cor. 3:15). But in addition to that, there is also this basic law of reality: *You cannot see what you will not look at.*

Virtually all Jewish synagogues follow a yearly reading schedule through much of the Old Testament. There are set readings for each Sabbath as well as special readings (some of them pretty extensive) on holy days. Every Sabbath includes a *parshah*—a reading from the Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy, which they read through entirely every year)—followed by a reading from the Prophets, called the *haftarah*. The same schedule is followed year after year, and has been for centuries and centuries.

If you look up the yearly synagogue reading schedule on the, you will discover that Isaiah 53 is never read. Ever. Not in the weekly Sabbath readings. Not on any special holy day. Now you might think, "Well, there are probably a good many other passages that are omitted as well." And you're right; there are many other passages that are omitted. But this omission is a particularly curious one.

Every year around September one of the scheduled Sabbath readings is Isaiah 51:12-52:12. Notice where this reading stops? What do you suppose the following Sabbath *haftarah* reading is? Isaiah 54:1-10. That still might seem like mere coincidence, except for the fact that within a seven-week period, the Sabbath *haftarah* readings cover Isaiah 49, 50, 51, 52 (up to 52:12), 54, 55, and 56. It's hard to escape the impression that Isaiah 53 has been surgically removed from circulation in terms of any regular, public, Jewish exposure to it. You cannot see what you will not look at.

Now, that's not to say that Jewish interpreters have historically just completely ignored this passage. The standard Jewish interpretation for the last 1000 years is that the "servant" in this passage is the nation of Israel itself, whose history of suffering has atoning value for the sins of all the other nations. It's an interpretation that bristles with all sorts of problems, but that's for another post. It's enough for the present purpose to raise one simple question: *If Isaiah 53 describes Israel's national suffering as God's servant on behalf of the whole world, and promises a glorious future in which she will be exalted and rewarded by God for all her sufferings, would you expect a passage like that to be so scrupulously avoided? Wouldn't you expect this, of all passages, to be cherished and included in the Jews' yearly reading of the OT?* You cannot see what you will not look at.

Remember how we started this morning. We looked at pride and we looked at guilt. We saw the danger of denying the truth because we don't like the light it puts us in. But a believer must be willing to see the truth and take it to heart, no matter what. We will see next week that God foretold His Son's coming in terms that no one who can read could miss. But you cannot see what you will not look at. I pray that we could glean from the amazing insight into the work of Christ everything we need to make us **see and tell the truth about ourselves, love Christ more and serve Him with all we have.** We will see so many of the reasons that He is so deserving of all our love and trust in the next several weeks.