

## Treasure

Isaiah 53:10-12

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If you have your Bible with you please turn to Isaiah 53:10-12. It is good to be with you this morning. I trust that the Lord is meeting you in this Advent season. It is good. I am one of those that personally does not like singing Christmas songs before Christmas, but we are—we're on this side of the cross. And so it is always good, it is always right to rejoice and be glad in the salvation of our Lord.

This morning as we are celebrating the third week of Advent, we're concluding our time in Isaiah Chapter 53, looking at the suffering servant that Isaiah prophesied in his book. His prophecy shapes the hopes of the people of Israel for the Messiah to come to redeem the people of God. And this passage that we have been looking at—and certainly the verses that we'll be paying more attention to today—are very central to the New Testament in understanding how Jesus fulfills this role of the suffering servant, how he is the Messiah that was promised. And the life and the suffering of the Lord-servant that's described in verses 1-3 and how those are then further explained in verses 4-6, and then how our passage today, verses 10-12—how they explain the meaning behind the servant's voluntary and unjust death.

Let's begin by reading the passage. Isaiah 53:10-12.

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him.  
he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,  
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days.  
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

<sup>11</sup> Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,  
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
because he poured out his soul to death  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many  
and makes intercession for the transgressors. [ESV]

The word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Let's pray. Lord, draw near to us as we worship you, as we hear your word, as we are reminded of the beauty and the depth and just the abundance of your love. That you would in your mystery and in your majesty you would will it to happen. That you would know that this was the path to bring about your redemption in your servant. We look to him, Jesus, as the author and finisher of our faith. The one who serves on behalf of

many and brings us back to you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

What we treasure often becomes the lyrics in our songs. What we treasure often becomes the lyrics in our songs. We sing love songs. We sing songs about work, our possessions, our riches. And so we often sing about what we treasure.

And the Bible is full of songs. The Book of Psalms by themselves are nothing but songs. It is the hymn book for the people of God. Many of which are about troubles and sorrows, of course, but the Psalms are also full of praise and rejoicing. Of course the Bible has other songs, as well. I'll give you two examples at this point. In Genesis 2 we see Adam singing. He's singing of Eve being the only creature in God's good creation that matches him, that completes him. Moses in Exodus 15 sings about the Lord's deliverance out of Egypt.

And what we treasure—just like these two examples and the other many examples found in Scripture—they point to what we treasure, and what we treasure we take delight in. We find, or at least we seek, we try, to find satisfaction from treasure. And though we can sometimes selfishly hoard it to ourselves, to selfishly just keep it to our own pleasure, it's best when it can be enjoyed with others.

But that's where lies our greatest weakness. We often treasure that which doesn't have lasting value and that which doesn't truly satisfy. And today's passage remedies that. Today's passage is the culmination of this great song of Isaiah about the suffering servant and is pointing us to this great treasure this central to our understanding of how God's salvation is the greatest treasure. And so we're going to look at this briefly. We're going to take it verse by verse: 10, 11, and 12. And we're going to look at how God's salvation is fundamentally connected to his delight.

Look at verse 10. It begins with: "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief." And then likewise in verse 10, it ends with that same phrase, 'the will of the Lord.' It shall "prosper in his hand." The Lord's will is the same thing as his delight. It's what he is pleased to do. It is what he takes pleasure in. It's the thing that is an extension of who he is, flowing out of his nature and out of his character to fulfill all that he desires. And it's more than just desires, it's that he's planning it. These things are woven together in who God is at his core, in that what he desires happens, and he takes great delight. We know from Scripture that the Lord God is One, and he has also revealed himself in three persons, and in his nature, as it's likewise connected to his character, God is completely holy. He's perfectly righteous and he's infinitely good.

So we learn that through the Lord's servant, as he willingly lays down his life, it is the Lord who desires it and plans for it. The text tells us the Lord wills to crush the servant and put him to grief. That word 'grief' is an echo from earlier, verse 4, where "surely he..." meaning the servant, "has borne our griefs." This idea of our. . . It's a combination of our sorrows, it's a combination of our weakness, our sickness, that he is bearing our sickness. Verse 10 reveals it is the Lord who has brought this about.

But why? Why? Is it because the Lord takes pleasure in suffering? Is it because the Lord is capriciously violent? Of course the answer is a resounding “No!” God reveals himself to be abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, and he proves himself of that over and over again.

In addition to that, the middle of verse 10 is important. It gives us further clues about God's character. Notice how the beginning of the verse and the end of verse 10 begins with that phrase, ‘the will of the Lord.’ When that happens in Scripture, it's a pattern that helps to kind of close in what's being focused upon. It's drawing our tension to what's in the middle, if you will. We need to pay attention. And so we see that the Lord does not crush the servant because he is enjoying the pain that the servant is experiencing. No, it's that there is purpose and there is lasting effect for it.

What is that purpose? The servant is to be a guilt offering. We can read about guilt offerings from Leviticus 5:14-19. And the occasion for a guilt offering would be a breach of faith, an unintentional sin against the holy things of the Lord, the things that he's commanded. And in this guilt offering the guilty one is to make atonement for the sin. They are to bring a ram to the priests, and the priests would make atonement for the sin of the guilty, as well as restitution and compensation for any damages caused by the sin. The sin was both forgiven and the guilt removed by the blood of a ram without blemish. And so we see that in this desire, this delighting in what is happening to the Lord's servant, it is focused upon what the servant is accomplishing. It is what he is offering in of himself.

And verse 10 also tells us that in this act, in this work of the servant, there is lasting effect. Though Isaiah doesn't explicitly say ‘death and resurrection,’ the language of this verse, as well as the context, speaks to the servant's own death as the guilt offering. But we see that death is not final, and that the servant will then ‘see his offspring’ and shall ‘prolonging his days.’ This language is a blessing associated with family and long life. How can you have offspring and long life if you are stricken, if you are cut off, if you're crushed, if you're dead. Only if there is something unique about the servant, who is not bound by death and who prospers the will of the Lord. This is how Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, that Jesus himself—he died for our sins. That he was buried and that he was raised on the third day, according the Scriptures. There is death for the guilt offering, but there is life in what is to come. This is truly a mystery that the Lord God, Creator and sustainer of all things, is active and involved in the world, though not responsible for sin. But in this action, this activity, he brings about redemption through the servant's death as a guilt offering. So God's salvation as the ultimate treasure is perfectly embodied and fundamentally connected to the Lord's delight.

It goes further. Verse 11. We're looking at how God's salvation is accomplished only by the servant's satisfaction. Look with me at verse 11. “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.” This is further themes of the whole passage, of what is the work that the servant is doing. The servant is the substitute. The servant is putting himself in place of the one who is guilty. We see that this is not only just the pain, the physical

suffering, but it is an anguish to his soul. Just the idea of his life, his breath, is in anguish. It's an overwhelming sensation.

But in this “he shall see.” Now some of your [versions] may say, “he shall see light.” But the idea is that he shall see what he is accomplishing and he shall be satisfied. Because it's not just something that falls flat. It's not some last ditch effort, kind of storming the beaches, this is the last way we can win. This is the way to win. This is the way that God is going to bring about redemption—through the death of the servant.

And it's not just his death that is in view. It's what the death accomplishes. “His knowledge.” Now your translations, as well as it can be kind of taken in two ways. “By his knowledge,” meaning the knowledge of the servant. But it also could be interpreted as “by the knowledge of him,” meaning as we look to him as the one who is doing these things. Either way the sense is the same. That it is the one who—if you flip back to Chapter 52:13—that introduces this whole song. It is the servant who acts wisely in the knowledge, in the fear of the Lord. He is the one that is going to bring about the righteousness of the Lord.

And in this act, this substitution, this guilt offering, he is making many accounted righteous. This is the assurance of pardon that we read today. I'll be reading it in a few moments again. This is what theologians often call ‘The great exchange’ that takes place in the gospel. That the guilt offering is in our place, and our sin is now being borne on that guilt offering and it's being removed. The sin is forgiven; the guilt is removed. And it is accounted righteous. It is as if you never did it. There's more to be said about that as we move in a few moments to the third point, but the point of verse 11 is that the suffering servant bears our iniquity and he makes atonement. He pays with himself and makes restitution.

And taken together we have to. . .we can't separate that from the next point. And we can't, we can't conflate them. They're both, they're different actions, but at the same time they are so held together in the work of the servant. That as we look at this treasure of God's salvation we are seeing that God's salvation is a lasting victory shared. This victory is directly related to those actions of the servant in verse 11, and with victory comes reward. We see there in verse 12 that together the Lord and the servant divide the portions. This is something that they are sharing in that together. It's saying something about the nature of the God who is doing this. That together the Lord is doing—as well as now the servant—dividing the portions among the many, among the strong.

Now that can be confusing, because sometimes your translations may say ‘among the great,’ among the. . . the interplay between many and great and strong. And there is a sense of it calling back to what the servant is doing with silencing before kings. The sense of in his victory that which is low, that which is cast aside, is now exalted high above, is lifted up, and now there are portions among them.

And it mentioned ‘spoils.’ What are the spoils? Well, in war leaders are channeling a warrior spirit and their resolve to actually do something, to execute objectives in a mission. And there is

this fine line—especially in the ancient times—but there is a fine line between savagery and discipline. With war comes awful atrocities. Pillage and assault, humiliation of the conquered. And for much of the ancient world the spoils were part of payment and morale for the ones doing the fighting. This could be clothing, it could be fine jewelry, it could be treasure, it could be food and other valuables; it could even be people. And so at first glance this could be off putting. But again it's rooted in the character of who is the one doing the conquering. As we look to his character that helps us understand what is happening in these spoils, if you will.

The language itself—the verb—actually helps us focus upon the subject of the action instead of the objects. But that's where our attention goes, is it not? Our attention very quickly goes to: What do we get out of this? But rather, the verse is focused upon the one doing the dividing. This brings into focus God himself, in his complete holiness, his perfect righteousness, and his infinite goodness. This language draws our attention not only to him, but also to the future, and it keeps us focused upon the one who's bringing that future. The focus is the victory in the victor. How was this victory won? This is incredibly important for verse 12. The victory is won—yet again it's stating that it's due to the servant's action of pouring his soul out to death. The word 'soul,' that life, breath. Emptying yourself of the point of breath. Emptying yourself to the point of nothing remaining. This is accomplishing our redemption.

Additionally the victory is won because the servant was assigned a place with the transgressors. Now this is what's revolutionary about Christianity. It is very natural to want to put the strength and the might and the wisdom and the wealth with the column of who are the victors. And punishment and justice with those who are the defeated—who are the ones that are rebelling against the king, the ones who are outside the bounds of what it means to be in relationship with the king. But that's not what we see here. The Lord's servant takes his place with the transgressors. And in doing so he bears their sins. He bears their iniquities. In the guilt offering back in Leviticus 5 it is the guilty one who bears his iniquity, therefore needing the ram to be the atonement. Here we see the innocent one taking the place of the transgressor and bearing the iniquity.

And lastly this victory is won—and with lingering effects. The suffering servant makes intercession. Not only does he take his place among the transgressors, but he advocates for them. He is on their behalf for the one who is righteous and just to smite, to kill, to demolish the rebels, to conquer them, to defeat them. And here the suffering servant puts himself in place and advocates for those who are rightly in the wrong...or for God to be rightly seeking his wrath. And so what is won by this victory? It is nothing less than the total identification with the transgressors. It's an intercession on their behalf and the complete forgiveness and removal of all guilt.

I mentioned the grand exchange, the great exchange. It's in the context of this grand victory that brings about that great exchange. 2 Corinthians 5:21. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In God's system from the Old Testament there were plenty of ways that—in the system of the temple and the sacrificial system—of ways of making atonement. There were various offerings, various

sacrifices that could be made. And that was also very common in surrounding nations of the ancient Near East. Human substitution is much rarer. There's one example that comes from ancient Mesopotamian texts. Upon hearing an omen that the king was to suffer his demise, there was a ritual that could take place where the king would temporarily remove himself from his throne and he would place another in his throne. This substitute king would then hear the omens, all the evil that is supposed to be coming upon the king. There are incantations and rituals that he could perform to draw all the evil calamity toward him, and then the substitute king would be put to death, carrying the fate of the real king upon himself, delivering him from the evil. Something tells me that substitute king does not go willingly.

But our God, in his redemption, in the salvation that he provides by his grace, in his mercy, and through his Son Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the suffering servant, we actually have the exact opposite. We have a king who empties himself from his throne, and he takes the calamity on himself so that you and I won't suffer. That you and I won't face what is justly and deservedly coming our way. That is the gospel. That is atonement. The fact that our God, in his will, in his delight, makes this happen.

Now there are times, there are reasons why these texts can be hard for us to hear these days. There are ways that our families have hurt us or abused us. The way authority figures have let us down. And so when we see authority figures doing something, and that language of God willing something and delighting in something, it is a very common accusation that Christianity is about cosmic child abuse. It's very trendy the past ten years or so. And we can suffer with that; we can wrestle with that. But the beauty of the gospel is that it reframes our understanding. It redirects our sense of what we deserve and what God himself takes on our behalf. This grand victory brings about the great exchange.

Now you may have heard on Wednesday, this past Wednesday the 14<sup>th</sup>, a theologian and pastor by the name of R.C. Sproul passed on to be with the Lord. He spent his life singing of his treasure, his Savior, his Lord Jesus, who makes atonement for our sin, who makes us accounted as righteous, who welcomes us into his family and remains faithful to grow us to be more and more like Jesus. Russ Pulliam in a Washington Post article said this of Sproul: "Whether he was writing for children or speaking to adults, Sproul brought theology, which to many seemed abstract and hard to comprehend to the common person. Sproul taught Christians to follow God not only with their hearts and souls, but also with their minds." It was a fair article, even though it wasn't always the greatest writing. But it was a great homage to a man, not because he was great, but because he gave his life to the One who is great.

Because he believed at the center of the universe is a Creator who makes it possible to also be the Redeemer. He doesn't create us and let us go to our ways and say oh, you messed up. Too bad. Our God from the very beginning shows himself to be kind and merciful. And he is also just. Because this is what is happening in the grand plan of God's redemption. His salvation is for him to call a people who were not his people, to become his people to have a relationship and fellowship with him. To be in a family, in a household that is being identified with him as Creator and Redeemer.

And so what we treasure often becomes the lyrics in our songs. I mentioned some other songs earlier that are in the Bible. Another song is a song sung by Mary, the mother of Jesus. And she sings this:

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
For he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name. [ESV, Luke 1:46b-49]

She goes on and on talking about the promises of God, the greatness of God, the mercy of God. She is rejoicing in the salvation of her Savior. Later, the shepherds were given over to song due to the glad tidings and the songs of the angels that they heard, the good news that a Savior was born in the City of David. And upon hearing the shepherd's news, Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Later, a man named Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel, the comfort of Israel. The very thing that Isaiah is prophesying that will come to pass. Here he is in his old age and he is rejoicing and giving thanks, giving praise to God, saying:

.. for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel. [ESV, Luke 2:30-32]

This passage is easy. This passage is difficult. There are some interesting textual things going on that get people like me who are nerds excited. But for other people it can glaze you over. You can be like, this is boring, this is stupid. I don't understand. But the message of the Gospel is in these verses. He who had no sin, who knew no sin became sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God. This is the message of Christmas, and this is the song we sing. And what we treasure becomes the lyrics in our songs. Mary and Simeon and so many others throughout the history of the people of God—so many of us in this room today, our own stories of God's deliverance, our own stories of God's comfort, proclaiming the Lord's greatness and his salvation.

God's salvation is the greatest single treasure that we can have. He is the greatest single Giver that exists. And Christmas is the time that we receive his grace in flesh in a baby. Sometimes that's disjointing, too. A baby. Cute, cuddly, whiny, pooping, crying, giggling, cooing, crawling, walking, hungry, weeping, beaten, pierced....dead. *And then alive!!!* That is no small, ho hum thing. Christmas is not just going and getting presents. Christmas is not just listening to Christmas music or watching Christmas movies—which we love to do. It is recognizing the salvation of our God, and it is the greatest treasure.

He makes it possible for us to share in his victory, because he makes atonement for us. He

makes us sinless, in the sense that he makes us righteous. We still sin, but in the meantime we wait and we long for our Savior's return. We celebrate the table. We proclaim his death. We wait. Because we know the victory is sure. We know that his promises are fulfilled, and he is coming back. Let's sing about that.

Let's pray. Father, help us sing. Help us to rejoice. Help us to weep. Help us to rejoice in our weeping. Help us to weep in our rejoicing. Help us to have our focus upon you. Lord, may we proclaim the excellences of your majesty. May we proclaim the beauties of your salvation. May we know it in our lives. May we appropriate it. May we recognize how you identify with us, the transgressor, the sinner. And there is nothing that can separate us from your love because you have made it finished. May we rejoice in your salvation, treasuring it in our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.