

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**January 26, 2014**

**The Servant Songs of Isaiah: The Loveliness of Jesus**

**Isaiah 52:13-15**

**Prayer:** *Father God, I just, I thank you that you are the immortal, invisible God, the God who has visited us and Father, we are so grateful and thankful for that visitation. Father, we thank you for your grace and the abundance of that grace. And again, Lord, as we spend this time opening up your word, we are looking at your servant songs. And again Father, I just pray that your Spirit, your Holy Spirit would guide us, would accompany us as we open up your book, that you would draw us deeper and deeper into a love for you and that you would give us the ability to not just see this but to hear it and to understand it, and to make it a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

It was Jonathan Edwards who said true religion, in great part consists in the affections. What he was after is what drives a person to grow in his love and in his knowledge of God and God's kingdom. Some people think that structure and rules and measurable progress is what makes you grow in your faith. And so as soon as a person publicly acknowledges his need for Christ, he's given this

list of things to do and rules to keep. That's what the Pharisees did and Jesus hated that. In *Matthew 23:1-4*, it says: *Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you -- but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger."*

Now there's other folks who see it in the exact opposite way. They see becoming a member of God's kingdom and living the Christian life as simply agreeing with a set of principles. I believe Jesus is God, I believe that he died for my sins, therefore because I believe those things, I am a child of God. Well, *James 2:19* says: *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder!*

Between these two sinful extremes of legalism on the one hand and easy believism on the other, lies the right and proper pathway to growing in your knowledge and service of Christ and kingdom. And it is so simple that it is often times easy to overlook. You see, the way to grow as a Christian is to fall deeper and deeper in love with Jesus Christ. If you can remember back to what it was like when you first fell in love. Maybe you're in love right now.

You'll understand that love makes serving your loved one a joy. I mean, the things that the love of your life asks you to do are different than any other tasks that you have to undertake, and the love that you have makes even the most onerous task doable. You know, I'm not fond of tuning up cars but 40 years ago if Janice asked me to tune up her car, then knowing that doing that would please her would suddenly make doing it something that I wanted to do. The more I grew to know Jan, the more I fell in love with her. The more I fell in love with her, the more I wanted to serve her for the pleasure that it gave to me. Jesus makes that same connection in *Matthew 11:28*. This is what he says, he says: *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Now the reason why his yoke is easy and the reason why his burden is light is not because living the Christian life is a picnic in and of itself; it is not. It's because the sacrifices made to please Christ fall into the same category of sacrifices made to please someone you love. The more in love you are with that person, the more that yoke becomes easy. That's why Jesus says in *John 14*: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

Now you might be thinking, how do I fall in love with a Jesus I

don't even know? Well, the Bible answers that this way in *1 John 4:19*, it says this, it says: *We love because he first loved us.* Now that is truly a loaded statement. You see, most of us come to Jesus because our lives just simply are not working. You know, we face some sort of crisis, physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, we were in some way at the end of our ropes and there at the end of that rope we discovered there was a God who loved us long before we even knew it, a God who understood that our greatest crisis was that we were a flawed and fallen sinner separated from a holy, spotless God. So that God became a man and he lived among us flawlessly, and then he offered up that flawless life as a substitute for ours. Jesus rescued us when we didn't even realize we needed rescuing. All we knew is that there was something not working in our lives and Jesus became our solution. And the fact is for most of us, we came to Jesus because we found him useful. Amazingly God is willing to accept us even on those terms. We come to God offering him our messes and then we find that he's been pursuing us all along. We surrender our lives to him mainly because we find him so useful. We ask Jesus into our lives, and when he does that, his Holy Spirit takes up residence inside us, and when the Holy Spirit comes into us, he opens up our eyes so that we can begin to see that instead of just being useful, Jesus is altogether lovely. *We love because he first loved us.* You see, it's my job to help you fall deeper and deeper in love with Jesus.

And to do that is to merely learn more and more about him, because the more you learn about Jesus, who he actually is, what it is that he gave up when he sacrificed in order to rescue you, the more inclined you're going to be to love him. And the more you love him, the more you're going to feel that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

This leads me to our final servant song this morning. Now, we've been studying the servant songs for a couple of months now and the servant songs are written in the prophet Isaiah's book and they are prophetic messages identifying and speaking to the servant of the Lord who is Jesus Christ, the Messiah. They're called songs because they're written in a unique form of Hebrew poetry and they're scattered throughout the book of Isaiah which is in the Old Testament, and you'll recognize each of these servant songs because they're often quoted not just by biblical scholars but also by the New Testament writers as well. In fact, in Luke's gospel, Jesus himself identifies himself as the servant in the servant song. So these songs are actually prophetic prophecies about Jesus. Centuries before it was to take place, God brings us in these songs to the place where Jesus actually does the rescuing of his people, and that place is the cross. And there Jesus took on your sin and my sin and there God's justice was poured out not on us individually but collectively on him.

This morning's song recounts how that was to come about. It's actually part of Isaiah 52 and 53. It's the very end of 52 and the beginning of 53. We take it up at *Isaiah 52:13-15* which says this: *Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you -- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.* Now, to put this into context, this fourth song is really the culmination of the other three. Jesus who wouldn't even be born for 800 more years is referred to in these songs as the servant. And we've been looking at them, as I said, for months now. In the first song we learned that the servant is actively going to seek out the lost. In *Isaiah 42*, verse 3 it says the of the servant: *A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.* So we ask, could there be anything more useless than a bruised reed or a faintly burning wick? You know, if you've ever been gardening or landscaping, and if you came across a bruised reed which is really a flower or a plant that's been stomped on or abused by an animal or another person, you do what I've done thousands of times, you either pluck it up or snap it off. You know, if I come across a candle that's about to go out, I'll just grab the wick with my fingers or maybe I'll just lean over and snuff it out. Both examples represent not just profound weakness but a weakness that

can provide no benefit in exchange for any extended mercy. In other words a broken reed and a smoldering wick have got nothing to offer. But they were who Jesus went after. A bruised reed is someone broken in spirit; a burning wick is someone on the verge of having the light of their spirit snuffed out. And we saw that in the first song, Jesus is God's servant ministering to these very people.

And in the second song, we encountered Jesus' own frustration in bringing his love and his perfection to a people who wanted no part of it. Jesus was the light, and the darkness resented that light. Jesus understood how difficult and frustrating it was bringing the light to those whose first love was really the darkness, and it brought him to the place where he cried out in *Isaiah 49:4*: "*I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.*" So we looked forward into Jesus' public ministry and we saw the willful ignorance and rejection of the crowds, the religious leaders and even Jesus' disciples as the source of incredible frustration and pain for him. Yet we also saw in the midst of that pain that Jesus was able to place his focus right where it belonged. In *Isaiah 49:4*, the servant says: "*Surely, my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.*"

The third servant song that we looked at takes a very dark turn in

*Isaiah 55:5-6* which says this: *The Lord GOD has opened my ear and I was not rebellious; I did not turn back. I gave My back to those who beat Me, and My cheeks to those who tore out My beard. I did not hide My face from scorn and spitting.* Now, understand the implications of what Isaiah is saying here. Isaiah wrote some time around the eighth century BC, hundreds of years before Christ would even be born, and yet here in this song, the servant is giving details of what's going to take place when he finally goes to the cross. You see, because Jesus gave up the use of his attributes when he became one of us, he essentially had to start from scratch by learning from the scripture who he was and what his mission on earth was going to be. And so he got some of that information by reading these servant songs. *Isaiah 50:4* says this: *The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.* That's amazing. You see Jesus needed to be taught. Now, Jesus needed instruction because he had emptied himself of the prerogatives of omniscience, relying instead on God speaking to him through the Old Testament Bible. There in Isaiah's servant song and in other places, it was confirmed to him that not only would he be humbled to be in a position of a student, having to gain instruction and learning, but also he would be learning that his ultimate purpose lay not so much in being a teacher but in being a lamb slain for



the sins of his sheep. Jesus describes the process as one of utter and complete submission to authority. No matter how difficult or terrifying the instruction was, Jesus could say in *Isaiah 50:5*:  
*The Lord GOD has opened my ear, I was not rebellious; I turned not backward.*

The Father had much to instruct the Son on. You see, when it came to living as God in the flesh among men, Jesus had to learn that he would encounter only two types of people on this earth. There would be this tiny minority of those who loved him and a vast majority of those who hated him without a cause. Jesus told his own disciples in *Luke 21*: "*You will be hated by all for my name's sake.*" He identified this gut level hatred by describing two different camps that the world is divided into, and those camps have not changed in 2,000 years. You are either a lover of this world or you are a lover of Christ, but you can't be and you won't be a lover of both. Jesus said in *Matthew 6:24*: "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.*" And in *John 15:18-19*, he described the consequences of making these choices. He says: "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*" He's

referring to us. These are Jesus' words; they're not mine.

Now, I'd be the first to admit to you that if you asked the average person on the street, "Do you hate Christ," he's going to look at you like you have two heads and tell you that that's a ridiculous question. But is it? I mean, consider that once and only once God made himself vulnerable to his creatures and we responded by mocking, torturing, and killing him. I think we can make the case that we as a people have nothing but hatred for our creator. I know for certain had I not been loved first by a God I had no love for, that I would have joined those crowds that day and shouted, "Crucify him!" See, when God wrote the servant song of Isaiah, the cross was some 800 years in the future. And still he spoke about it as if it had already happened, and here it's critical to understand what Jesus was prophetically claiming when he said: *I gave My back to those who beat Me, and My cheeks to those who tore out My beard. I did not hide My face from scorn and spitting.* You see, Jesus gave his back, he gave his cheeks, he gave his beard to those whose hatred drove them to torment him. Had he for one moment decided to exercise a molecule of the power that belonged to him over those who were torturing him, then all of that pain and all of that humiliation would have ceased instantly, the cross would never have happened, and you and I would have been doomed forever.

So in the first song we learn that the servant will actively seek out the broken and the lost; in the second song we encounter Jesus' own frustration in bringing his love and his perfection to a people who want no part of it; in the third servant song we come face to face with Jesus willingly handing himself over to those who plan on butchering him.

In the final song, the cross looms as an overwhelming source of triumph and horror. And the poem begins with a triumph. *Isaiah 52:13: Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.* God has entwined two concepts here so they really have become inseparable. You see, there's no doubt that the cross was the most degrading experience a human being could ever go through, but if that same cross became the measure of God's character, if it demonstrated to the universe how far God would go to rescue his people, if it truly demonstrated the height and depth and length and breath of the love of God in Christ Jesus, well then the more the enemy sought to use the cross as a means to degrade God himself, the more it would serve to demonstrate God's love. Even the term God used to describe the cross is a unique two-sided reference to the inability of the enemy to use that cross as the weapon he expected it to be. God said in the servant song: *Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be*

*high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.* The term "lifted up" is an expression that was understood by all of Christ's contemporaries as referring specifically to crucifixion. You see, the act itself consists of being nailed to a crossbar and then being lifted up for all to see. And Jesus referred to himself this way in *John 13:14*, he says: *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."* And that the crowd understood "lifting up" to be crucifixion is borne out by this dialogue that take place in *John 12:31*, it says this, Jesus says: *"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."* He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, *"We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"* So to lift up is to crucify.

I spoke last time about how degrading an experience crucifixion had to be, noting in all likelihood the fact that Jesus was probably stripped naked to be put on display on the cross. So how could he say he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted? Well again, the lower Jesus was brought down, the more the inhabitants of heaven marveled at the humility and the love of their God. Satan saw it as his golden opportunity to publicly debase and

degrade the God who had thrown him out of heaven, but heaven itself was enthralled with what Jesus was accomplishing. In fact, what Satan had intended for evil God was superintending for glory. Revelation 5:12 describes all of heaven itself: *Saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"* Heaven gloried in what they saw Christ accomplish on the cross. But only Christ will ever know the full depth of what it cost him to win that victory, and the Father is determined that we never forget what it is that his Son went through on our behalf.

So God says in the servant song: *Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you -- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.* I submit to you that this may be the most terrible verse in all of scripture. In this verse God takes us from the exaltation of Jesus being high and lifted up to the very bottom of his disgrace. He takes us to astonishment at what Jesus has gone through. The Bible declares that Jesus bore God's wrath for three

hours on the cross. And what took place during those three hours was so hideous that God determined to hide it from human eyes.

*Luke 23:44* says this: *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed.* Matthew's gospel says: *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over the land until the ninth hour.*

Understand that in midday, the entire area went black. And at the center of this spiritual black hole was the servant Jesus hung suspended on a cross in midair rejected by both God and man. The cross was the perfect symbol of the fact that earth and its creatures had utterly rejected the God who had come to save them and that a holy God had to reject the sin he had become for us. And so for three hours, Jesus hung suspended between two worlds, rejected by both.

Now, you and I understand time in a very linear way. We understand that minute follows minute, hour follows hour, you get 24 of them and you have a day. But God is in no way restricted by a human understanding of time. *2 Peter 3:8* says: *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* Now we also know that God's justice was a perfect justice. We also know that hell is real and that God says hell is eternal. On judgment day Jesus declares that he's going to separate the sheep from the goats. In

Matthew 25 he says: *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.* Jesus uses the same Greek word here "aionios" which means "perpetual" or "eternal" to describe the fate of those who were headed to heaven on the one hand and hell on the other. He says both of these states last forever. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has paid the ransom price of our sin and because he's paid that price, our sin debt is no more, and we are forever free. We can stand before God perfected not because we are without sin but because the sins we have committed have been paid for by someone else. That someone else is Jesus Christ. The gospel tells us that God himself became a man and lived out his life perfectly in order to substitute his perfect life for our sin. And we understand a perfectly just God must punish sin or else his justice isn't perfect. I mean, God could not just declare by divine fiat that sins were now forgiven. I mean he could have. And if he had done that, he would still have been all powerful but he would not have been all just. Justice demanded that sin be paid for, and God made it clear that the wages of sin is death. Eternal death. He set that penalty aside the only way that he could, by taking it on himself. You see, his enemies considered the cross to be the ultimate in guilt and shame and disgrace and they reveled, they reveled in seeing him so debased. They thought it was their ultimate victory. They never realized that Christ would use their own weapons against them.

See, by dying in our place he not only denied the accuser his right to us but he also demonstrated that the greater the shame, the greater the disgrace, the more the exaltation, the more the glory. Jesus played out in the flesh what he said in *Luke 14:11*: "*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" And so Jesus humbled himself unto death, even the death on a cross.

I remember when I was a youngster, I was told that Jesus died on the cross and somehow by his dying on the cross the gates of heaven suddenly swung open. I confess back then and there, I never got the connection. I didn't understand it. I couldn't see how the death of anyone could suddenly make the gates of heaven swing wide. See, I didn't understand then what the Bible was saying about how Jesus was going to accomplish that. I said last time the scripture declares that Jesus was not just nobly shouldering the burden of our sin. He wasn't just coming to the cross bearing our sins with him in some external way, he was coming to the cross having become our sin. *2 Corinthians 5:21* says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* I pointed this out last time, I said Jesus didn't come to the cross separately bearing with him the sin of lying; he came as the lie itself. He didn't just come nobly bearing the sin of lust; he came as the physical embodiment of all



the lusting that had ever been done from his sheep all the way back from Adam forward to the very last lust of the last sheep. And the same is true of pornography, or drug addiction, brutality, wife beating, jealousy, envy, and the countless other sins that he willingly took on himself in order to rescue us from ourselves. He became our sacrifice. I pointed out in the Old Testament, the high priest, he would literally take his hands and he would place them over the sacrificial animal in order to objectify and quantify and place that sin on the animal. Jesus was the Lamb of God, and all of the sin that you and I would ever create was objectified, quantified, and placed on his spotless head in such a way that God would look at him as at sin itself. There on the cross, God saw in Jesus the collective evil of all of his sheep looking backwards to Adam and forwards to the day of judgment. There God attacked the evil that sin had stored up for thousands of years looking backwards and who knows how many years looking forward by punishing the one who would become that sin on the cross. God's wrath instead of spilling out individually on the heads of the guilty ones was objectified, quantified, and then placed on the head of Jesus. That's why God could say in *Colossians 2:13*: *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the*

*cross. You see, God is very clear here about how this debt was canceled. It was nailed to a cross. In fact, Jesus flipped the enemy's scheme. That's why the very next verse says: He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

Now, no human being will ever know what Christ truly endured during those three hours that he hung on the cross. We know he absorbed God's collective wrath stored up from the first sin of Adam in the garden of Eden through your sins, through my sins that we commit every single day to the final sins of the final saints who will be living when judgment day arrives. We know that perfect justice demanded that Christ paid the equivalent of an eternity in hell for every last one of his sheep, and we only know that God was somehow able to compress that payment in full into three earth hours while Jesus hung on the cross and the world sat in darkness, and so we're left to speculate as to what really took place during those three earth hours. Now we know that time itself is relative. In fact, we know from physics as that you approach the event horizon of a black hole, time itself literally slows down. So we wonder, did God slow time itself down at the cross? Is God not capable of placing whole eternities between seconds? I mean, is time relative enough so that three hours, one mere eighth of a revolution of the earth, could be perhaps trillions and trillions of years in a realm

you and I know nothing about? We don't know. You see, God folds the darkness over that piece of information and we're left only with hints, speculations, and inklings. But here's what we do know. We do know that perfect justice demands an eternal payment for each of us. We do know that after three earth hours on the cross, Jesus bowed his head and uttered three final words indicating that that payment had been made in full. *John 19:30* says: *He said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.* We also know this, we know that when that three-hour veil of darkness had lifted, people had this response to the lifeless body of Jesus on the cross: *As many were astonished at you -- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.* See, here's what we know. As the darkness left, the crowd viewed with astonishment the fact that the body of Jesus was no longer recognizable as human. *His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.* That's what we know. The exalted one, the king of the universe, the one who spoke everything that has being into being, the one who left heaven, came to earth, lived out his life perfectly and wound up being so shattered for you and for me, that he was no longer recognizable as human.

I said at the beginning of this message that the key to effectively

living somewhere between the legalism of the Pharisees and the easy believism of the present day sad state of the church is to simply fall in love with Jesus Christ. The more you love Jesus, the more you want to know about him. The more you know about him, the more you find it astonishing about his love, his grace, his wisdom, and his power, the more he shifts from being a God who is altogether useful to a God who is altogether lovely. You know, 40 years ago I came to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I -- I came to him because I knew he was the God of the universe come down to save me from my sin. I knew Jesus as useful because I knew he was going to save me from myself. I really knew very little at that time about Jesus as lovely. I've had 40 years to examine the loveliness of Jesus, and I know I haven't even begun to scratch the surface. But I also know this, I know the more I learn, the more I love. And it's that love that drives Jesus when he says in *Matthew 11*: "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" You see, the reason why his yoke is easy and his burden is light is the same reason why tuning up Janice's car 40 years ago was easy and light. I was in love.

You know, folks say there needs to be an application to every

message, and every message needs to be put to work. Here's the work, and here's the message: Fall in love with Jesus Christ. And there's really only one way to do that. Jesus says: *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.* Well, today we learn that Jesus Christ was so shattered by the enormity of the penalty he had to pay to rescue us that even though he was God in the flesh, he was rendered unrecognizable as human. We also learned that he was so wise and so brilliant and so humble that he knew that the ultimate in humiliation would result in the ultimate in exaltation as the universe marveled at the length, the width, the breadth, and the depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus. So 800 years before it would actually take place, God would say to his servant in this servant song: *Behold, my servant will act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you -- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.* You see, we exalt Jesus primarily because we find him useful. He saved us from death and that is deep truth. That Jesus is lovely beyond measure is an even deeper truth, a truth that will open the door to delighting in serving him.

You see, Jonathan Edwards was right when he said: True religion, in great part consists in the affections. Today's the day and now is the time to actively grow those affections by learning more and

more about the Jesus we serve. Let me conclude with *Philippians 4:8*: *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Jesus is all of those things. Let's pray.*

*Father God, I do praise you and thank you for who you are. I thank you that we have an eternity to discover the amazing length and width and breath and depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus. I thank you we have the opportunity while we're here today to scratch that surface, to dive in deeper and deeper, to learn more and more about who you are and what you've done for us. Give us the grace, Lord, to comprehend that depth, that knowledge, that insight that would drive us, that would drive us to serve you because we love you, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*