

A Portrait of Christ

Isaiah 53

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Bible Text: Isaiah 53:2

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Whose heart was opened it says of her. And the second thing is what Bob just read. That there is a judicial blindness that God Himself has put upon this earth, upon sinners, the sons of Adam. When he fell, we fell. And God is just in leaving people in that darkness, in that blindness, should He so be pleased. Some people take exception with that, but God is God. This is not an ongoing trial like some think, that every person born in this world has a shot at it. No, we are born condemned. And if God in His mercy has not paid your debt in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, then He is just in His condemnation.

What I want us to consider today in a few moments here is in verses 2 through 9. And I want to speak with you on the portrait of Christ that we see here set forth. It says in verse 2,

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. 9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Clearly there is more there than what we can look at in one sitting today, but consider the portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ that is set forth here. He is seen in verse 2 as a plant out

of dry ground. In verses 3 and 4 and following, we see Him, the picture of Him, as the man of sorrows acquainted with grief. And then farther down, we can see Him as the great shepherd of His sheep, in verses 6 and following. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." It's an interesting picture of Christ because He is both the shepherd, but He is also the Lamb of God.

So much here to consider. But considering a portrait, it's typically a painting. It's a photograph. It's a sculpture, or some other artistic representation of a person in which the face and the expression of the face are typically predominant, when you talk about a portrait. We've all seen them. Some in banks, some in different halls of justice to remember past presidents or judges, whatever it is. The intent of the portrait is clearly to display some sort of likeness of the person, their personality, or sometimes you can even see the mood of the person when the portrait was done. And so, in every true sense, it's not an actual picture like you would have a photograph of somebody, but a composed image.

Sadly, today there are many people whose only image of the Lord Jesus Christ is that which has been painted. Some artist has taken and put a picture of a man as they suppose Him to be on a canvas or sculpted an image of what they presume was how He was. The Scriptures are very clear when you read them, particularly in Exodus 20:4, "Thou shalt have no graven images before Me." I've had people argue with me. They say, "Well, you know, we really don't worship them." Well, why are they in the place of worship then? As you look around this room, there are no images, there are no crosses, there's nothing in any sense of a physical portrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe we have to be very careful, even with regard to our children in storybooks. I get people all the time asking, "What Bible storybook do you recommend?" Well, it's called the Bible. Just like Bob stood up and read for us. There is a reason this Word is written as it is written. And there is nothing better that you can do with your children than to simply read them the Scriptures. People complain about the King James Version today. Believe it or not, it was written for a sixth grade education. So when someone tells me they don't understand it, just because there's a thee and a thou. It is written in a language that is understandable and one that is easy to remember if the Lord will grant remembrance. Paul wrote of Timothy that "from a child thou has known the Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto Salvation." If our children remember anything, let it be the Word and not some picture that they saw in a storybook.

But the one picture of the Lord Jesus Christ is that which the Spirit of God gives to His children, and that's the Word revealed in the heart. Which would you rather have? The image of a man-made drawing on your mind, and imagine that that's how Christ is, or would you rather have a picture just as I've read here in these few verses that require you to go back, and consider, and look, and weigh these things that the Spirit of God has revealed? I've often said, "If Christ had intended for us to have a picture of Himself, there were artists back in His day. He could have just as easily taken an artist and told Him, commissioned that artist, to draw some paintings of Him and His disciples as they went

from place and place and insert these in the portions that concern those pictures. But He didn't. The clear image and picture of the Lord Jesus Christ that every sinner needs is that which the Spirit reveals in the heart and that is not the work of man. If we want the most accurate picture of Christ, we don't need to look any farther than what's revealed here in His Word.

If you look in John 14, for example, and I won't dwell long here. In John 14. I've worked a number of years in different places and different countries, and one of the arguments for pictures has always been, "Well, the people are illiterate. How are they going to understand if they can't read?" Well, I'm thankful, number one, that the Scriptures say that faith comes by what? Hearing. And hearing by the Word of God. And I think there has been a great disservice done in the name of Christ in foreign lands by assuming that because they're illiterate, what we need to do is give them pictures. Do you know what that does? It plays into their natural idolatry, because they've grown up with images around, and when someone comes and says, "Look, get rid of those images. Here's some other images of Joseph, and Mary, and Christ that you can put in the place of these images." Well, what are those images that you just got rid of? They're idols. So what are you replacing? Idols. That's not how the Lord does His work.

You can see at one point even one of the disciples questioned our Lord in John 14:8. "Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Now, He could have very easily said, "Now, let me get a sketch board here and let me see if I can describe for you how the Father is." The Lord didn't do that. He simply said in verse 9, "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?"

So clearly, all that God the Father purposed to be revealed of Christ He purposed to be in His Son. That's really why He said that there were not to be any graven images, because there is none that can be like unto God other than He who is God, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the image which God purposed men to have, His person and His work that He came to accomplish. And so the Lord Jesus Himself is the perfect revelation of the Father. No one has ever seen God but Jesus Christ, and He is the only Son of the Father, and He it is that makes Him known.

If you look in John 1:18. I think sometimes that people have a misunderstanding that in glory there is going to be three persons inhabiting the throne. There is going to be God, somehow, and then there is Jesus, and then there is the Spirit. That's the way our depraved minds work. But Christ clearly said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." There is a distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit, but the revelation of the godhead is in one person, that's in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. And that's clearly set forth here in John 1:18. "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." That's important. If we're to see God, if we're to see His Son, it's through the declaration, it's through the faithful declaration, of Christ to the heart. That's what Isaiah was doing in His day. He didn't try to come up with simpler means of explaining this to the people. He knew the judgment which God had

passed on that generation of blindness, much like we have today, ignorance. But he didn't say, "Let me see if I can come up with new and innovative ways to try to get people to believe." He didn't. He simply declared Christ, the portrait of Christ, all that is necessary to the salvation of a sinner is revealed right here in this Word. And we're in trouble when we try to add things, or imagine that somehow we are going to make people understand because we explained a little differently, or simplified a translation so called, messed with it. No, just leave the declaration as it is. It's clearly Christ being revealed in the heart.

Here in Matthew 11, just a couple more verses for you to look at. Matthew 11. And it's to this end I pray. If some are made to see, as I've heard some of you say that the Lord has blessed His Word and caused you to see of Christ, it wasn't because of the illustrations. It wasn't because somehow it was explained a little better. No, if you truly have been taught of Christ, it's because the Spirit Himself opened your heart, gave you ears to hear and eyes to see. "Whereas, once I was blind, now I see."

Here in Matthew 11 this is clearly described as the work of Christ. This is His work to do. It's not up to man. In verse 25, beginning there, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Think about a baby. It can't even take care of itself. It doesn't know what's going on unless somebody takes care of it. That's how the Lord reveals Himself in sinners.

And it says, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son," and that all important explanation, "and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." There's some He's pleased to reveal Himself in, and there are others He passes by. And we must be brought to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, two other verses here for consideration. 2 Corinthians 4:6. And again, this is in answer to the question, "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Well, it's to those in whom the Lord Himself is pleased to reveal. 2 Corinthians 4, Paul said in verse 5, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." That one verse describes the responsibility of any who stand behind a pulpit. It is not to preach themselves. Their one subject must be Christ Jesus the Lord. It's a very clear assignment given there. And if any should ask, "Well, what's your role?" He says, "Ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." It's like John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

But now, how is that work done in the hearts of the hearers? Verse 6. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It's that revelation in the heart whereby we're made to see Him with eyes of faith and not physical eyes. Peter brought that out in 1 Peter 1. If you will look over, this is the last reference, and then we will get back to our text in Isaiah 53. But 1 Peter 1. I saw this on a preacher's desk one time in a frame, and it struck me, because so many times you're used to walking into

some minister's office and there is a picture of Jesus on the wall or something that identifies him as a clergy. And this is all he had in a frame, 1 Peter 1:8, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." I don't want some man's picture defining Christ. I want to know God's picture. I want to know His portrait. And it's not whom having seen with our physical eyes or heard with our physical ears, but this Word that is revealed. This is the Spirit's word that we have opened here to the heart, and may he be pleased to teach us of Christ. "Whom having not seen ye love, and whom not yet having seen ye believe." Such is God's purpose.

But let's take a look at this first picture. We'll probably not get much farther than this today, so we'll focus on this in verse 2 coming back to Isaiah 53. The portrait we have of Him here is that of a plant out of dry ground. I've traveled quite a bit in some foreign countries that have been very much desert, and I can remember different occasions where you're out there in the middle of nowhere, and it is about as dry as it comes. You wonder if there is anything living. And then you come upon some sort of bush or some sort of plant that's out there in the middle of nowhere with beautiful flowers on it. And it has always amazed me, number one, how on earth that plant is growing where it is, and, number two, who it's there for, because you're in a place that hardly anybody goes by. But it's always been a reminder whether men see it or not, God planted it, and what He plants, He sustains. And whether men see it or not, it's still for His glory. He just allowed me to be a passerby, and to appreciate it, and wonder. Such is His work.

Well, with regard to Christ, that's how He's described here in verse 2, "For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant." All of these words are important. The Bible often speaks in proverbs or parables, and here Christ is described as growing up before Him, growing up before God. This is important when we consider Christ coming to this earth. I believe that what we have described here is very clearly a picture, a portrait, of Christ's incarnation, taking on flesh. He did not just descend out of heaven with blazing glory as a full man and introduce Himself. There were a lot of parallels between Him and that of a tender plant when you consider the feebleness of a baby, of even a fetus in a womb. We talk about travel conditions today, and it was when Mary was in full pregnancy that she had to get on a donkey and go to Bethlehem, because it was there that that census was to be taken, but, ultimately, we know God purposed according to the prophets that Christ would be born at Bethlehem.

And so you ladies that have been pregnant and understand a little about your concerns during pregnancy, I'm sure that Mary in her thinking had such thoughts, and yet her baby was as safe as if she were home in a comfortable place. That baby was no more in danger being born in a manger. You can imagine her concern as Joseph came back and said, "Every inn is full." Have you ever panicked in a strange town where you found out that all of the hotel rooms are full, and the closest one is a hundred miles away? You kind of panic. "Am I going to have to sleep in the car by the wayside?" That's in modern times, and yet in all of these things the Lord Himself was as safe as if to be born in a modern facility where their specialty is birthing babies. All of these things, though a tender plant, yet all of it was before God.

"He shall," I like the way that's put, "For He shall grow up before Him." There was nobody or nothing that was going to take His life before it was His time. And you think about how often He was pursued, and appeared to be weak, and groups of angry mobs that surrounded Him, at one point even to go and to cast Him off of a mountain side. And yet, He walked through their midst. That was His Father keeping Him. But He was to be born as a tender plant, and you can see there "as a root out of a dry ground." That's what made me think of those instances where I've seen some of those plants growing out of the middle of nowhere where you'd never dream to see a plant there.

But is not Christ the promised root of Jesse? Isn't that what the Scriptures how they describe Him who would come, and would bear the branches of His people, that that tree should bring forth fruit? That's what encourages me when I see in verse 2, "He shall grow up." In other words, His coming, even though He appeared in His weakness in a body, yet nothing was to keep Him from accomplishing that purpose for which He came. Christ in nothing failed in anything with regard to the work that He came to do. "He shall grow up before Him." And the understanding there is that He would become that tree, that tree of righteousness that would most certainly bear the fruit that He came to get.

Certainly when it speaks there of the dry ground, you can think of the situation in the day of Christ when He came. Nothing but hardness. John wrote of it in saying, "He came unto His own, but His own received Him not." We're talking about people that had the Scriptures. We're talking about religious men that took pains to copy in the original, word for word, letter for letter. They would even count letters. That the Scribes knew precisely the number of letters in each book, so careful were they in preserving the Scriptures. And yet, when He came of whom the Scriptures spoke, they knew Him not. They received Him not. Such was their hardness. I believe that's the desert of which it is described there, "as a root out of dry ground." He was born in that environment.

If you look in Isaiah 40:3. This is a prophecy that we saw concerning John the Baptist. "The voice of Him that crieth," notice how it's put there, "in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Now it was a desert in the day when Isaiah was raised up to preach. The Lord said of Him, as we saw in the very first chapter, that it would be a people whose eyes the Lord had blinded. Bob read it in John 12. It was the same thing in Christ's day. They were settled in their religion. They were settled in their traditions. They were settled in their customs. Much like today. Some of the most hardened people are ones that presume they're as good for heaven already as their own name. That's what people say when you talk to them. "Well, don't talk to me! I'm as good for heaven as my own name." And you ask them to explain on what basis that is, they'll talk about their denomination. They'll talk about when they were christened when they were baby. They talk about holding to the faith. They talk about how they've lived their life to try to please God and obey the commandments. They give all these reasons for their hope, but it is a false hope. If that were the way to heaven, then Christ died in vain. Christ died in vain. There is a reason these Scriptures are here to point sinners to the only way.

Paul even wrote that to the Galatians in chapter 2, the last verse. He said, "If righteousness come by law," the keeping of the law, or any keeping of any observance, ordinance, "then Christ is dead in vain." If there were another way, then God Himself would have been unjust in putting His Son through what He did. But if the Lord God, the Father, put Himself through this way, this means, sparing not His Son, but delivering Him up, let it be a declaration to all that there was no other way.

But we find men just as hardened today. This dry ground is an apt picture of every sinner that is born in this world fallen in Adam. It describes every one of us here. Maybe there was a time when we didn't know it, but when it pleased God to reveal Christ in us, that was when we realized we were dead. We had been dead. We had been lost. Israel is a type of all who are lost, and Christ is that root, the single root, as He is described here, that would bring forth fruit in such a desert.

If you look at Hosea 14, hold your finger here and just go forward toward the end of the Old Testament, and you will find Hosea 14. We can see by way of these prophetic passages what the Lord purposed to do, and that was to raise up an Israel. And this is where the Jews have it wrong today. They assume that it means natural Israel whenever we come to such portions. But clearly, there is a spiritual Israel that God has purposed to raise up and has in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here in Hosea 14 in verse 4, beginning there, we read, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel," and notice, "He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth His roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and His beauty shall be as the olive tree, and His smell as Lebanon." Who is the "He"? Who is the "Him, His"? That's none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, this one described here as a root out of dry ground.

And then again, in Isaiah 27 in verse 6, with the coming of the Messiah, Israel took root. In other words, Christ being that Israel. Christ being that root. And has spread to the ends of the earth with His fruit. The fruit of His salvation. There is none that will perish for whom He died. Here in Isaiah 27 in verse 6, you read, "He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." Again, a picture of Christ who was of the seed of Jacob. He was David's seed, the promised seed. He came and took root. And His Israel did blossom, has blossomed, has budded, and has filled the face of the world with fruit. Christ has a people today out of every tribe, nation, and tongue of people that He paid their debt. And before the Father, they've been justified. He's that olive tree that we find Him described in the New Testament.

For example, in Romans 11. If you will look over there, Romans 11. This is hard for some to get, because whenever they hear the word Israel, they automatically think of a nation over there that's one hundred and twenty miles long and twenty-seven miles wide, or seventy miles wide. They think that's Israel. But actually Israel, national Israel, was but a type and a picture of the true people of God, the true Israel of God, that Christ would come and redeem. And the word Israel means prince with God. So when you

consider who is the true Israel, it's Christ Himself, first of all, and then all those who are in Him. And that's clearly what we see here in Romans 11. I wish we could read the entire chapter, but I'll just read enough, some key verses, to hopefully help you to see this. But for example, in verse 1 of Romans 11. You see, as you read Scripture, you have to distinguish between whether the writer is talking about national Israel, or whether he's talking about spiritual Israel. Paul had just stated in chapter 10 in verse 21, "But to Israel He saith, All day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." There again is the desert. There's the wilderness in which national Israel lay when Christ came.

But look at verse 1 of chapter 11. Paul says, "I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." What Paul is saying is if God had completely cast away every Jew, then he, Paul himself, would have had no hope. But the fact that he, Paul, being an Israelite of the seed of Abraham of the tribe of Benjamin, had been brought to Christ, then the only thing he can conclude is what we see here in verse 2, "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew." You see there is natural Israel, and then there is people among Israel whom God foreknew. Foreknew in the sense that He knew beforehand what He had purposed with them, His purpose to save them in Christ. And so that was Paul's hope. He said, "I'm a Jew, but I'm thankful that even though the majority has been blinded, yet there is a remnant according to grace which God has not cast off." And that's what he speaks of down there in verse 5, "Even so then at this present time." There's that little plant rooted and growing up in a desert place that is the wonderment of people that go by. And I believe that's true of every one of us whom the Lord has been pleased to save through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and that shed blood, and His righteousness. Why me? When there is so much deadness around us and in us, myself at one time having been dead and lost, and yet when it pleased God to reveal Christ in me.

Notice the only way that were possible as verse 5 states, "There is a remnant according to the election of grace." If it's an election of grace, it doesn't mean you did anything to deserve it. Grace is without merit. And if there's been an election, it is God determining who He will save and who He won't. It's not like one popular preacher in explaining, I saw this written in an article, explaining somehow election. This was the preacher's explanation. He said, "It's like a vote." He said, "Election is a vote. God has cast His vote. Satan has cast his vote. And now the deciding vote is up to you." My heart just fainted when I thought about the number of people that would read that article from this preacher who was well known and had so many followers. That's not the election of God. It's an election of grace.

And notice, verse 6 explains it. If people would just read far enough. This plant growing out of the dry ground, even Christ coming, and a body prepared for Him, and offering Himself up as a sacrifice and a substitute for sinners. It's all grace. He is full of grace and truth. And here it says, "And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." You can't have a mixture. There's no mixture. It's either grace or works. You cannot take your works, and add it to this grace, and call it salvation. You do so to your

own detriment and destruction. And it's all of grace. And that's evident in the explanations that follow.

"What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." And that's the way it is. God is going to save everyone He purposed to save, and the rest will remain blind. No amount of coercing or trying to get them to believe, it's not what we do. It's not my goal in preaching to try to get some to believe whom God has not chosen. That will never happen. Or presuming that somehow there are some that still might yet be saved whether Christ died for them or not. That will never happen. The Lord knows those that are His. The payment has been settled and done.

But according as it is written, verse 8, "(God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompense unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway." But you can see this Israel of which the Scriptures speak going on into verse 11. "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall," He's talking about the Jewish nation, God giving them over to a blindness, "salvation is come unto the Gentiles," unto the nations, "for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?" He says, "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh," that is Jews according to the flesh, "and might save some of them. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches."

The firstfruit is Christ. He's that root of which we are reading here in Isaiah 53. And because He is holy, those for whom He has paid the debt are made to be holy. They are declared holy. It's not by tradition. It's not by denomination. It's not by profession. But it's being in Christ. It's being in this root that grew up out of a dry ground and being one of the branches of that particular root. A branch is passive. It's not doing anything to grow the tree. It's being grown. It's all in connection with the root. And so again, as we consider Christ that root out of a dry ground, no matter how difficult the situation may appear, one thing is for sure: if the Lord has redeemed one, that one He will call, He will draw. Ours is simply to declare Christ and to set Him forth, and God will do His work where He will and when He will.