

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #77

Isaiah 52:13-15

W. A. Criswell said that one time he heard of an American soldier who had been in World War I in France and had been critically injured by a bomb that exploded in front of him. He lost the use of one of his limbs and was greatly disfigured. The saddest part of all of this was that he also lost his memory. He couldn't remember his family name and he couldn't remember where he was from. For years he would travel to various gatherings and he would ask, "Does any one know who I am?" People would look at this mangled, disfigured soldier and no one had a clue as to who he was (*Isaiah*, pp. 229-230).

That is the way it was when Jesus Christ was here on earth. He walked through this world and when people looked at Him they were astonished. He basically kept asking, "Does any one here know who I am?" "Has any figured it out?" No one should have missed the identity of Jesus Christ, especially when you have a prophetic text like this in Isaiah.

GOD IS GOING TO SEND HIS SERVANT/SAVIOR INTO THIS WORLD AND INITIALLY HE WILL BE BRUTALIZED BUT EVENTUALLY BE HIGHLY EXALTED.

F. C. Jennings said that when we come to this part of Isaiah, "We are now standing on the very threshold of the Holy of Holies of our book and we do well to fear lest a carnal touch should make its defiling mark on this sanctuary" (*Studies In Isaiah*, p. 609). What we have here is the very heart of the book of Isaiah - Jehovah saves in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The final three verses of chapter 52 and the 12 verses of chapter 53 have been called the "Servant's Song" or "Servant's Poem." These verses were originally written in Hebrew and may be classified as Hebrew poetry. There are five main stanzas, each comprised of three verses, in this portion of Isaiah which has also been called the "Mt. Everest of Messianic prophecy." Dr. Warren Wiersbe outlined the stanzas in a manner we think is very accurate, and with some minor changes we think his outline is a good one to follow (*Be Comforted*, pp. 133-141):

STANZA #1 - The introduction of God's shocking Servant. 52:13-15

STANZA #2 - The rejection of God's suffering Servant. 53:1-3

STANZA #3 - The substitution of God's saving Servant. 53:4-6

STANZA #4 - The submission of God's silent Servant. 53:7-9

STANZA #5 - The vindication of God's satisfied Servant. 53:10-12

In this passage, God shows that the salvation of the nation Israel and the salvation of any sinner may only be wrought by God's Servant/Savior.

This text in Isaiah is one of the most known and loved passages of the entire Bible. It is a text that reveals amazing details concerning Jesus Christ and His crucifixion some 700 years before He was born. The grace of God in these verses has brought millions from sin to salvation.

Jewish rabbis and scholars at one time taught that this passage revealed intimate details about the Messiah, until the 12th century when they changed and said it referred to the suffering of the nation Israel. William Kelly says that the “more modern writers, who dread the ancient application of the prophecy to the Messiah by their fathers, have invented a double means of escape” (*Exposition of Isaiah*, p. 337). But this may easily be shown to be ludicrous, because by just taking two sentences of the poem, we may see that this interpretation is impossible. **Verse 6** says “the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him,” not on a nation. **Verse 9** says “His grave was assigned with wicked men,” not the nation’s grave.

What is most interesting is something that Drs. Keil and Delitsch picked up on, and that is, even those Jewish rabbis who believed it did refer to the Messiah yet to come, missed the fact that He already did come (*Isaiah*, Vol. 7, p. 303). Jonathan Ben Uziel says in his Jewish commentary that he thought that this section referred to the Messiah yet to come (F. C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah*, p. 612). So even those, who believe this does refer to the Messiah, can’t seem to realize God’s Messiah did come to Jerusalem and was crucified there.

Most modern day Jewish teachers totally disregard this text as referring to the Messiah and do not teach it to the people of Israel. The effect is that most in the nation Israel are blind concerning Jesus Christ. However, any honest exegetical approach to this text clearly shows that this is an amazing prediction of precisely what would happen to Jesus Christ. As Keil and Delitsch say it is like Isaiah is writing this sitting “beneath the cross upon Golgotha” (*Ibid.*, p. 303).

Over and over again the New Testament affirms this text in Isaiah refers specifically to Jesus Christ (Matthew 8:17; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:27-40; I Peter 2:21-24). Over and over again this passage affirms that the Servant-Messiah who will suffer for the sins of the people will one day be highly exalted.

The three closing verses of Isaiah 52 introduce us to a full view of the Messiah.

STANZA #1 – The introduction of God’s shocking Servant. 52:13-15

In these verses we are introduced to God’s Servant. We will notice that **verse 13** begins with the word “behold.” This is God speaking and God basically says I want you to take a serious look now at My Servant. This is God asking us to take a serious, deep, consecrated look at His special Servant/Savior. This is God’s Servant, this is God’s Messiah, this is God’s Savior and God says take some time right now and take a serious look at what I have to say to you about Him right here and right now. If a person does this, if a person honestly takes a serious look at these 15 verses, there is no other conclusion that you may draw except this is an amazing prediction pertaining to Jesus Christ.

God is going to show us some startling things. The reason why He is called God's Servant is because of the unusual assignment He has from God the Father. By taking on this assignment of being "God's Servant" we understand that His responsibilities will include a servant's assignment that will eventually lead to great exaltation. But this road to exaltation will be brutal.

There are four critical facts we learn about Jesus Christ in this first stanza:

Fact #1 - God's Servant will prosper. **52:13a**

This certainly is exactly what one would expect if One were the key Servant of God. One would expect that He would prosper. The Hebrew word "prosper" gives the idea that this Servant will always act in a wise manner that will cause God to prosper Him.

Edward Young says this Hebrew word specifically has to do with "intelligent and effective action" (*The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 3, p. 335). This is a sequential action; one acts in a way that pleases God and then God prospers the person. When a person chooses to act wisely from God's perspective, the end result is always success and prosperity.

What is revealed here is that Jesus Christ would always think, say, and do the things that would lead to the full blessings and prosperity of God. This becomes staggering when one considers what is described in these verses, because what He would actually do is not what we would expect a prosperous servant to do.

There has been only one Person who has ever walked on this earth who has always acted in a wise way in the sight of God. Every other human who has ever walked on this earth has played the part of a fool.

Fact #2 - God's Servant will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. **52:13b**

Many have observed that the three steps of exaltation described here include His resurrection, His ascension, and His exaltation. His death led to His resurrection, which led to His ascension, which led to His exaltation.

Because this Servant would always do that which is right, He will be highly exalted. There is certainly no hiding the fact that Jesus Christ will one day be highly honored. This has always been the expectation of Israel concerning her Messiah. That He would be the most highly honored Person to ever come into this world.

Again, this is what one would expect if one were a servant of God. One would expect that He would be high and lifted up. The truth is, this Servant would end up highly exalted. Every knee will bow before Him and He presently sits at the right hand of God the Father and one day He will rule the world - Philippians 2:9; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3.

Fact #3 - God's Servant will be marred more than any man. **52:14**

Now before the exaltation would come the depths of humiliation. Most Biblical grammarians take **verse 14** to be a subordinate clause to **verse 15**. In other words, **verse 14** is the dependent clause (protasis) and **verse 15** is the independent clause (apodosis). What this means is that the action described in **verse 14** will be that which will lead to kings shutting their mouths. What is described in this verse and the following verses was completely foreign to every preconceived thought and wish of every living Jew. No Jew in Isaiah's day, Jesus' day, and in our day wants to learn about a Messiah who will be treated like this one.

Isaiah 52:14 says that when people looked at Jesus Christ, they were "astonished" by what they saw. The word "astonish" carries with it the idea that the people were disturbed and paralyzed by what they actually saw. The treatment, the disfigurement was something they never expected to see. The word "marred" describes something that is so disfigured that the original state is destroyed (*Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 515). What this means is that when people looked at Jesus Christ, they couldn't even tell it was Him. He was not recognizable because He had been beaten so badly.

This is what you would never expect to happen to the ultimate Servant of God. You would never expect God's Messiah/Son/Savior to be "marred" more than any man you had ever seen. After all, this is God. You do not expect God to be brutalized.

This verse gives us specific information concerning the brutality that Jesus Christ would suffer. The beatings He experienced in the six phony trials before His crucifixion marred Him more than any human then or now. Even the worst of criminals are not treated as Jesus was treated. He didn't get any fair trial and He did not have any human rights. He had no defense team. There were no anti-death penalty advocates to picket and protest and come to His defense. He was treated worse than an animal.

When He was before Annas, Jesus was smashed in the face by an officer (John 18:22). When He was before Caiaphas, He was spit on, slapped, and beaten in the face with fists (Matthew 26:67; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63). When He was before Pilate, Pilate had him scourged with whips (John 19:1; Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15) and soldiers brutally punched Him in the face with their fists (John 19:3). His beard was ripped out of His face (Isaiah 50:6). By the time this was all over, you could not even recognize that this is Jesus.

Here was God's Servant, Son, Savior, Messiah and He was hated by every one every where He went. People looked at Him and said, could this really be God's Son? Then when they saw Him paraded through the streets, He was marred more than any man.

Most people marred to this level die. When we think about how marred some people have been in accidents or brutal beatings or killings we know this is true, most die. But not Jesus Christ. He lived through it all and was marred more than any man. Many theologians believe that during the three dark hours that Jesus was hanging on that cross, there were things taking place when He did not look human. He looked like "a bloody piece of quivering human flesh" (J. Vernon McGee, *Isaiah*, Vol. 3, p. 309).

Why? Why would God permit this? Why would this Servant willingly go through this?

Fact #4 - God's Servant will sprinkle many nations. **52:15**

Now contextually this point is significant. Isaiah has been talking about Israel being delivered from various captivities (52:2). Now God changes and says there must be a deliverance from sin. Before God would physically save Israel, He must spiritually save Israel.

Before Jesus Christ died, He made an amazing prediction: I will be lifted up on a cross and will "draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32). That is a very odd statement. People who die do not claim they will draw all people to themselves and their death. But that is the prediction Jesus made in John and that is the prediction Isaiah makes right here.

When Jesus Christ came to this earth, His initial appearance wasn't anything spectacular, but His impact was spectacular. Christ's impact is so spectacular that it will eventually shock kings and shut their mouths.

It is true that people were initially astonished by the way Jesus Christ was treated and looked. But there will come another day when all people will again be astonished by Jesus Christ. He will come in all of His glory and majesty and they will be left speechless.

There is coming a day when all the leaders of the world will see Jesus Christ and understand who He is and understand exactly what He did.

There have been many people who have died, but only one has died who actually affects everybody in the world. That One is Jesus Christ. He affected the nations. The word "sprinkle" refers to the ceremonial cleansing that was important to the O.T. Mosaic Law (Leviticus 4:8; 8:11; 14:1-7, 16; 16:14-15; Numbers 8:7). In Old Testament times, blood and water were sprinkled to cover sins; and even though it did not take away the sins, it made the person ceremonially clean and acceptable before God.

This Servant, who didn't initially look like much, would provide the most important sacrifice for all the nations of the world. His sacrifice could make sinners anywhere in the world right with a Holy God. Jesus Christ's blood can take away any sin from any person in the world.