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## Isaiah 53:1-6, 9-12 “A Prophecy of the Cross”

Intro. V.6 tells us of the problem we face. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way....” Isn’t that descriptive of humanity? We all have strayed from the right path. Like sheep, we are born with a sin nature that prompts us to go astray; and, like sheep, we foolishly decide to go our own way. Many times we have failed to do what is right.

This sin problem that we all have is not insignificant, but very serious. The prophet uses 2 different words to describe it in vv.5-6. He calls it transgression, which means rebellion against God, daring to cross the line that God has drawn (Isa. 53:5, 8). He also calls it iniquity, which refers to the crookedness of our sinful nature. Thus, we are sinners by choice and by nature.

How can the terrible sin problem be solved? The answer is found in this prophecy of Isa. 53. For hundreds of years God had been promising to send a Savior. Some would question if Isaiah was indeed referring to the Messiah. Well, that is just the question that the Ethiopian eunuch raised when Philip hitchhiked a ride from him in the desert. The Ethiopian was going from Jerusalem back to his own country, and he was reading this fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. As the Ethiopian was reading, his question to Philip was, “...I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” (Acts 8:34). Philip made it clear that the prophecy of Isa. 53 was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Not only did Philip affirm this, but other New Testament authors did as well. Isaiah 53 is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament more frequently than any other Old Testament chapter. There are at least forty-one different citations from this chapter found in the New Testament. (For example, see Matt. 8:17; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:27-40; 1 Peter 2:21-24). Furthermore, as we shall see, the details of this prophecy have been fulfilled in minute detail by none other than Jesus of Nazareth. Surely, He is the One this prophecy is about.

Now this morning I want you to see for yourself that this prophecy is indeed about Jesus, and I want you to see what He did to save us from our sins. Notice with me first of all:

### I. THE HUMBLE BEGINNINGS OF THE MESSIAH

The prophet says in v.2, “For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.” We now know that the Servant of the Lord is God’s Son, and yet He became human and grew up in a humble environment. Note the particulars of this prophecy. In v.2 we see that:

A. He Grows Up As a Tender Plant - He did not suddenly appear as a great tree, but came as a “tender plant.” Even so, Jesus started out as a baby, born in poverty in Bethlehem. In childhood He grew up in a carpenter’s shop in despised Nazareth (John 1:43-46). He was young & tender to begin with. Furthermore,

B. He Grows Up as a Root out of Dry Ground – One of the amazing things about certain trees is that you can cut one down, even level with the ground, and in a few months you may find

new life springing forth. It is even more amazing if new life springs from the root that is in dry ground.

Well at the time of the birth of Christ the family of King David had been cut down. They were no longer princes but peasants. The nation Israel was under the iron heel of Rome. They were not free. Israel was a wilderness of dry ground, both economically, politically, and spiritually. Yet the loveliest flower of humanity came from one of the driest spots in the world's history. It was humanly impossible for His generation to produce Him, but He came nevertheless, for He came forth from God.

C. He Was Common in Appearance – The last of v.2 says, “He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.” These words probably describe His physical appearance from childhood to manhood. We all have our ideas of what Jesus looked like. We would like to believe He was strong and handsome, and even His appearance caused Him to stand out from the crowd. Yet this prophecy indicates that there was nothing about His physical appearance made Him different from a common, ordinary Jewish man. He had no stately form or splendor in His appearance. There was nothing about His physical appearance that caused people to take much interest in Him.

I believe this means that Jesus fully identified Himself with common people. That should encourage most of us. Furthermore, the prophet was warning His people that they should not expect a Messiah with an impressive, royal appearance. Yet the vast majority of people rejected Jesus because He did not fit their preconceived ideas of what the Messiah would be like. That is why Isaiah began this chapter with the words, “Who has believed our report?”

Not only did Jesus grow up in humility, but the prophecy also tells us of:

## II. THE SUFFERING OF THE MESSIAH

Notice the kinds of suffering the Servant of the Lord would endure:

A. He Would Be Rejected – In v.3 we read, “He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Psalm 22 also predicted this: “But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people” (v.6). John 1:11 says, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” He was even rejected by his own brothers in John 7. He was rejected by one of His own disciples. He was rejected by the leaders of His nation. He was rejected by some of the common people when they cried out, “Crucify Him, Crucify Him.”

There is no doubt but that such rejection brought sorrow and grief to Jesus. After all, rejection is one of the most difficult experiences of human life. Haven't you felt the pain of rejection? The emotional pain of rejection can linger longer than physical pain.

Why did they reject Him? Well the world wanted a conqueror; not a common carpenter. The world wanted a sovereign; not a servant. They were ashamed of Him because He did not represent the things that were important to them, things like wealth (Luke 16:14), social prestige (14:7-14; 15:1-2), reputation (18:9-14), and being pampered & served by others (22:24-27; Matt. 16:21-28). These values are not the ones Jesus promoted.

Jesus is rejected today for the same reasons. If you present the Jesus of the Bible, people will take a look at Him, and many will reject Him. Paul said the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18). Don't reject Jesus just because Israel did, or because

many reject him today. God predicted all along that His Messiah would be rejected, and many would not believe in Him!

Yes, Jesus suffered the pain of rejection. But notice what else Isaiah predicted He would suffer:

B. He Would Be Pierced – In v.5 we read, “But He was wounded for our transgressions....” He was “wounded,” which can also mean “pierced through.”

Doesn't this describe what happened to Jesus? Indeed, His hands and feet were pierced by nails (Ps 22:16; Luke 24:39-40) and His side by a spear (John 19:31-37; Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7). He was crucified, which was not a Jewish form of execution (John 12:32-33; 18:31-32). Capital punishment to the Jews meant stoning (Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35-36).

C. He Would Be Bruised - V.5 goes on to say, “He was bruised for our iniquities.” Isaiah 53 is the only place this Hebrew word is translated “bruised.” Normally it refers to something or someone being crushed on the ground, either by a burden or an oppressor.

Well, we do know that as He carried His cross, Jesus was so exhausted that He fell under weight of the cross. Yet the primary burden that crushed the Lord was our sin. V.6 says, “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (see v.12; 1:4). What a heavy, painful burden indeed!

D. He Would Be “Chastised” – V.5 also says, “The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” “Chastisement” refers to “discipline, chastening, correction.” Jesus endured the corrective punishment that we deserve. Part of that included receiving many “stripes,” for that was a common form of corrective punishment. Jesus bore the terrible pain of that whip known as the “cat of 9 tails.” It had fragments of bone or metal at the ends, and the whip would tear away flesh with each lash. See Him wince in pain with each lash of the whip! What suffering He endured!

E. He Was Numbered with the Transgressors – That's what we read in the last of v.12. The word “numbered” also means “to be reckoned, be assigned.” Jesus did not die alone. He died along with 2 criminals, just as indicated here. Mt. 27:38 says, “Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.” He was reckoned or considered by His enemies to be no better than the criminals He was crucified with. What shame & humiliation it added to our Lord to be crucified with such ungodly men! Furthermore, v.9 says, “And they made His grave with the wicked....” Normally, He would have been buried where other crucified criminals were buried, in the city garbage heap!

Indeed, as the enemies of Jesus looked upon Him suffering on the cross, they concluded that the cross proved that He was a sinner. In fact, we read in the last of v.4, “Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.” Many smugly believed that Jesus was just getting what He deserved.

But were they right? As we read the rest of this prophecy, the answer is a resounding “No.” We see in the last of v.9 that He didn't deserve such suffering. There Isaiah says, “Because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.” So why did God the Father not prevent or stop the suffering of Jesus? Their own Scriptures gave the reason for His suffering right here in this prophecy. So now let's consider:

### III. THE ATONING SACRIFICE OF THE MESSIAH

The prophet gives several reasons why the Servant of the Lord would suffer and die. First, it was:

A. To Take Our Place in Suffering the Penalty of Sin - The emphasis in verses 4-5 is on the plural pronouns. "Surely He has borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows; ...But He was wounded for *our* transgressions, He was bruised for *our* iniquities; the chastisement for *our* peace was upon Him, and by His stripes *we* are healed." Clearly, the prophet is saying He would suffering & die for us, in our place. This message was at the heart of Israel's religious system, the innocent animal dying for the guilty sinner (Lev. 16). This is what theologians call "the vicarious atonement" of Christ. We cannot explain everything about the cross, but this much seems clear: Jesus took the place of guilty sinners and paid the price for our salvation. Under the Law of Moses, the sheep died for the shepherd; but under grace, the Good Shepherd died for the sheep (John 10:1-18). We were the ones who had gone astray, yet He took our place and suffered what we deserve.

Sometimes I use an illustration that I learned years ago in Continuing Witness Training. V.6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray...." So let this hand represent you and me. And let this black pen represent our sin. So get the picture of "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned, every one, to his own way...." Now let this other hand represent Jesus. Now the prophet also wrote, "And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" [Move pen to other hand]. God took our sins, and He placed them on Jesus. So where are they now? They are no longer on us, for Jesus took them upon Himself. We can now be free of our sins. We are forgiven. He took your place and my place on that cross. His atoning death was the most essential part of the divine plan of redemption.

So why did Jesus die in our place? The prophecy gives yet another reason why Jesus was willing to suffer:

B. To Satisfy the Justice of God – We read in v.10, "When You make His soul an offering for sin...." That's the language of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Animals were sacrificed, and their blood applied to the altar, to make atonement and satisfy the holy demands of the Law. Now look down at v.11, "He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities." According to this verse, the Messiah would satisfy the righteousness of God and His holy Law. The theological term for this is "propitiation" (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2). God's wrath against sin is just because it offends His holiness and violates His holy Law. In His holiness, He must judge sinners; but in His love, He desires to forgive them. However, God cannot ignore sin or compromise with it, for that would be contrary to His own nature and Law. How did God solve the problem? The Judge took the place of the criminals and met the just demands of His own holy Law! As someone said, "God had to be satisfied before I could be justified."

This truth was vividly illustrated at the cross of Christ. Imagine for a moment Jesus suffering on that cross. He was on the cross six hours, hanging between heaven and earth from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. In the first three hours man did his worst. He spat upon Him, nailed Him without mercy to the cruel cross, heaped ridicule and insult upon Him, and many waited around to watch Him die. At twelve o'clock noon, after He had hung there for three hours in agony, God drew a veil over the sun, and darkness covered that scene, shutting out from human eye the transaction between God the Father and the Sacrificial

Lamb. During those three hours God made His soul an offering for sin as Jesus drank every drop of the cup of the wrath of God against sin. That cross became an altar where we behold the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. He was dying for somebody else. He was dying for you and me.

Now that the demands of the Law have been satisfied, another purpose for His suffering could be fulfilled:

C. To Grant Us the Blessings of Salvation – One thing that motivated Jesus to go to the cross and endure the suffering was the fact that many would benefit from His sacrificial work. Notice 3 of the benefits or blessings mentioned in this prophecy:

1. Peace – The last of v.5 says, “The chastisement for our peace was upon Him...” The only way a lawbreaker can be at peace with the law is to suffer the punishment that the law demands. Jesus kept the law perfectly, yet He suffered the whipping that belonged to us. Because He took our place, we now have peace with God and cannot be condemned by God’s law. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. Rom. 8:1). Jesus has bought peace with God to all who will believe.

2. Healing – The last of v.5 also says, “And by His stripes we are healed.” The “healing” in Isaiah 53:5 primarily refers to the forgiveness of sins. The apostle Peter affirms this in 1 Peter 2:24, where he says, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” Healed of what? Peter makes it quite clear that we are healed of our trespasses and sins (cf. Ps. 103:3). You see, sin is not only like a burden, but it is also like a sickness that only God can cure (Isa. 1:4-6; Jer. 30:12; Nahum 3:19.).

Yet Matthew 8:14-17 applies v.4 to our Lord’s healing ministry, where it literally says, “Surely He has borne our sicknesses, and carried our pains....” Salvation will ultimately lead to freedom from all forms of sickness. Aren’t you looking forward to the day, as Rev. 21:4 says, “there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” However, it should be clear to all that sickness and death remain a part of the Christian’s life, in spite of our spiritual salvation. This verse does not teach that there is “healing in the atonement” in the sense that every believer therefore has the “right” to be physically healed prior to the return of Christ.

Jesus did not liken the kingdom of God to a diamond, but to a pearl (Mt. 13:46). Of all precious stones, the pearl has the humblest origin. It begins with a wound and is created out of God’s resources for healing the wound. So the kingdom of God begins with a wound, the wound in the body of Jesus. Then we marvel at God’s resources for healing: physically, mentally, spiritually!<sup>1</sup>

3. Righteousness - It says in the last of v.11, “My righteous Servant shall justify many...” To justify means “to declare righteous.” He took our sins that we might receive the gift of His righteousness. 2 Cor. 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (cf. Rom. 5:17). Justification means that God declares believing sinners righteous in Christ and never again keeps a record of their sins (see Ps. 32:1-2 and Rom. 4:1-8).

How do you obtain these saving benefits? How can we have peace with God, healing for our soul, and obtain righteousness? We know the answer from other Scriptures [repentance & faith].

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<sup>1</sup> *Preaching* (March-April, 2004), 74.

In this prophecy we see movement from very humble beginnings, to the depths of suffering. Yet the prophecy also speaks of a dramatic change. The prophet not only speaks of the humility of the Messiah, and the suffering of the Messiah, but also the:

Conclusion: D. L. Moody was once about to board a train when he was approached by a man who wished to know how to be saved. The train was about to leave and Moody had but one moment to spare. "Isaiah 53:6" said Moody as the conductor waved his flag, "Isaiah 53:6." Then he said, "Go in at the first 'all' and go out at the second one." The train moved away and the man went home. He looked up the verse, did as he was told, and was soundly saved.

Isaiah began this prophecy with the words, "Who has believed our report?" Are you among those who will not believe, in spite of such a clear prophecy about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Or will you say today, "I believe in Jesus. I believe He died for my sins, and I want to be saved today." If so, I invite you to repent of your sins, and place your faith in Jesus. If you will do that, then your sins will be forgiven & taken away, for God will not judge the same sins twice. You can join those who have been made right with God by the blood of Jesus. You can have peace with God. You can have hope of eternal life, where there will be no more sickness or pain.

Christian, Jesus suffered and died for you. What are you doing for Jesus? Do you need to rededicate your life to Him? Do you need to move your membership to this church? If so, you obey your Lord as we give the invitation.

Sources: David Cawston (notes from sermon on rejection, v.3); Jim Henry (notes from his sermon on this text); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 3 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren Wiersbe, *Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Victor Books/SP Publications, 1993). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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