***THE SERVANT OUR SUBSTITUTE, Part 1***

**Isa. 52:13-53:3**

Turn to Isa. 53. – As I’ve promised you, we’ve come now to the climax of our special (& extended!) Easter series in Isaiah’s four famous Servant Songs. – From four different angles, Isaiah puts the spotlight on the most important Person in all the OT, the hero of the entire Bible, our Lord Jesus.

Isa. 53 has been called: “the summit of OT prophecy”; “the crown jewel of the Hebrew Scriptures”; ‘the most important chapter in the entire OT, if not the entire Bible’.

~ Polycarp called Isa. 53, ‘The Holy of Holies in OT prophecy’; Spurgeon called it, “The Bible in miniature”. – D.L. Moody called it, ‘My creed’, his entire confession of faith.

Isa. 53 is quoted explicitly 7x in NT, plus over 30 other allusions in NT! – There is simply no other OT text that the early church read & wrote & talked about more than this one.

What a perfect chapter to study on our last Sunday before REZ, when this year’s theme for REZ is: “What is the Gospel?”, the most important question in the universe. –

That’s why there is nothing that Satan & his demons work harder to prevent than you having a firm grasp on the gospel. – There’s nothing the Enemy is more determined to confuse people about and to distract churches from than this – the gospel.

Brief background to Isa. 53:

In the previous chps, Isaiah keeps declaring that God will save His people, that His righteousness will come, that His holy arm will rescue them! (E.g., 51:5-6, 8cd-9ab; 52:7-10...)

BUT *on what basis* can a holy God do this? – How can a holy God save & welcome guilty sinners to Himself without compromising His just character & integrity? – To use the language of Paul in Rom. 3, how can God be “both just and the justifier”? –

How can you have an *ungodly God*?! – Impossible. – But then, how? – At what price?...

Here is the most detailed statement in ALL the Bible about how God deals with our sin.

Stand & Read entire chp (from 52:13) & Pray:

Review: Isa. 42, “The Servant as Gentle Judge”; Isa. 49, “The Servant as Saviour of the World”; Isa. 50, “The Servant as Hearing, Hurt & Helped”

Now, “The Servant Our Substitute”

***\*FIVE STANZAS to stun us and make us sing about God’s Servant our Substitute:***

**1. vv. 13-15, The SUCCESSFUL Servant**

~ Nietzche, the German philosopher, “Success has always been a great liar.” – very deceptive, people can succeed in business but by corruption; in politics but not virtue, in public but not private, in sport but not morality, in man’s eyes but not God’s.

Not so in the case of our Saviour. – He IS the definition of success, the embodiment of success, the standard of success.

BUT His method of succeeding is a rebuke to our pride, an offense to our sensibilities. – As we learned in 1 Cor. 1-2, Christ’s way of success is God’s supreme folly, the triumph of His so-called folly in defeating the world’s so-called wisdom.

52:13a – Brings us back full circle to where we began in Isa. 42 (Sun. PM, 2 wks ago): An echo of the 1st Servant Song, back in chp. 42:1...

I.e., ‘In light of the previous 3 Servant Songs, and esp. in light of the suffering about to be described, you will be tempted to wonder if this Servant is a failure, a portrait of defeat. Not so!, perish the thought!’: v. 13a...

Here is God’s answer to HOW the great promises in the preceding verses will be fulfilled:

Read 52:7-10…

But HOW, how will God ‘bare His holy arm’ and flex His muscle to save the ruined & perishing?! – Answer: Through His successful Servant:

Reread: v. 13…

Prosper = act so wisely & effectively that the results will speak for themselves!

WHAT will this Servant’s success look like?...

NB, v. 13b = Talk about the crème of the crop, standing out head & shoulders above the rest, rising to the top? – No earthly success ever has or will begin to compare to this Servant’s accomplishments. – This Man’s success has no peer and no parallel. – It is in a league of its own.

NB, the language here (v. 13b) goes far beyond what is said of any mere human being in Scripture. – Here is yet another clue as to the true identity of this Servant.

Three actions here: “raised high and lifted up and greatly/highly exalted” – Anybody come to mind?

Any particular Person whose success caused Him to rise, and then to ascend, and then to be seated & exalted at the very right hand of His Father, “far above all rule and power and authority and dominion, above every name that is named both in this age and also in the age to come” (Eph. 1)? –

One whose suffering earned Him the right to have every knee bending and every tongue confessing that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father? (Php. 2:9)

Repeat: v. 13…

“All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to Me.” (Matt. 28:18). – “I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18)

But then this??: (a jarring twist in the plot, not what you’d associate with success):

v. 14 – ‘He will be abused & beaten beyond recognition, disfigured into a monstrous, ghastly sight.’ – Worse than some freak at a cheap carnival show….

What a JOLT from the beauty of v. 13! – From the heights of Christ’s glory in v. 13, with Jesus exalted on Heaven’s throne – now we plunge to the depths of Christ’s agony – with Jesus collapsed in Pilate’s court after being scourged, an unrecognizable and bloody mass of human flesh.

Repeat: v. 14…

The previous Servant Songs have hinted at the suffering that awaited Him – the temptation to grow discouraged, to be crushed (Isa. 42), His determination to give His ‘back to those who strike’ Him, His face to humiliation & spitting (Isa. 50).

BUT here the Servant’s suffering reaches a new low: He is so wounded & beaten that people are left astonished, wondering, ‘Is this the Servant? Is this even a human at all? Who is…*what* is this beast of man hunched down before us?’

‘This looks like some victim of a horrific auto accident, when you’re the one with the awful task of identifying the body, or at least trying to do so….’

Ps. 22:6, “But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people….”

v. 15a – Again, Isaiah JARS us with another sudden shift of gears in this chapter of majestic irony. – While the world looked at abused Jesus and assumed He must’ve been guilty of great sin to deserve such punishment, God declares that this Victim’s blood will actually cleanse the nations! – God says that this Servant’s blood was not being shed for His own guilt, but for your guilt & mine.

+ “Sprinkling” was often prescribed in the OT Law (used 22x in OT), in the cleansing rituals & purifying ceremonies for all that was unclean in this defiled, sinful world:

The priest would take oil, water, or blood and… “sprinkle” and splatter it upon whatever needed to be cleaned – a leper (Lev 14), the altar & all the temple vessels (Lev. 4 & 8), on the priest himself & his garments & his sons & their garments (Exod. 29:21; cf. Num. 8:7, water on the Levites; Num. 19, on those unclean b/c of a death in their household).

BUT NB here, v. 15ab, it’s not just sprinkling for Israel, but for?...

…the nations, represented by their kings, nations unreached & yet to be evangelised!...

As we’ve seen already of this great Servant: Isa. 42, He would bring justice to the nations. – Isa. 49, it was too small a thing for Him only to redeem Israel; He would also be a light to the nations, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth!...

NB, v. 15b, will shut their mouths = Mighty kings will be awestruck, gobsmacked. – Heads of state will be dumbfounded, speechless.

Earth’s most powerful people will stand powerless before this Suffering-yet-Successful Servant. – They will bow in stunned silence before King Jesus.

Who would’ve ever imagined it? – That there, in that marred and mangled figure (v. 14), was the very King of kings and Lord of lords.

Psalm 2 comes to mind:

“Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, that He not become angry, lest you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!”

There hung God’s Servant, beaten to a pulp in v. 14, presumably b/c of His own guilt, His own uncleanness?.... – YET in fact, He will be the source of cleansing for the unclean nations. –

The world thought He was victim, but God hails Him a Priest! – His suffering will perform a sprinkling, cleansing work of universal scope!

This is the kind of SUCCESS God will give Him – the ability to wash sin away, the saving power to take filthy, dirty, wretched & vile people in God’s sight, and to wash them clean, squeaky clean!!...

As 1 Pet. 1:2 says of every believer: “To those who are chosen aliens…according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood….” (through His Word/gospel)

Reread: Isa. 52:15a…

🡪Know where these final lines (v. 15bc) are quoted in the NT? – Turn to Rom. 15, read vv. 20-21…

Paul longed to join in the Servant’s mission to the unreached, of taking the gospel to those who’ve never heard – this was his one ambition!

How does this ambition feature in our priorities? – Do you truly believe that the unreached people are lost and headed for Hell UNLESS they hear of this Servant, Christ Jesus? – Do you truly believe that people are lost unless the hear & believe the Christian gospel? –

That Muslims by the billions, that Hindus & Buddhists, no matter how sincere – they must know about Christ or they will perish? – Do we truly believe Acts 4:12?...

~ As our own church Decl. of Faith reads, “We believe that God’s glory and fame must be spread to the ends of the earth for the joy of all peoples. We believe that apart from conscious faith in Christ, there is no hope of salvation for the nations.” –

HOW would you know if a church truly believes that? – What would it look like? – Would it not be seen in our giving & going, our sending & sacrificing, our witnessing & praying & caring, in every way possible, about missions & reaching the lost??...

🡪Christian, follower of this Christ, servant of this Servant: What are you doing to see the gospel spread to the nations?...

Have you thought of choosing where you live, work, shop, based on evangelistic opportunities, not just personal comfort/convenience?...

Reread: vv. 13, 15cd…

BUT THEN comes another contrast, more irony. – Though the far-off nations are hearing the gospel, the nation of Israel (birthplace of the gospel) are rejecting it…

**2. vv. 1-3, The SCORNED Servant**

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “To be great is to be misunderstood.” Never was that more true than with our Lord Jesus….

Begins here with 2 rhetorical questions, not necessarily expecting an answer…

v. 1a – Isaiah has moved from the Servant’s ministry to the ministry of those who go out in the Servant’s name. – NB, “our” message:

I.e., thankfully, some have believed, at least a few, a believing remnant, a “little flock” (Lk. 12). – These have been “sprinkled, cleansed” (52:15) by the Servant. – WE have received His message and become His messengers.

v. 1b – Show me one Christian who would have ever known Christ if God had not revealed Him? – No body, not one! (1 Cor. 2, etc.). – We know Christ, not due to any merit or intelligence or abilities of our own. –

No, only by His sovereign grace did He reveal His Son to us. – Gal. 1:16, ‘God, by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me’!

NB, v. 1b, WHO is Christ? – He is the very “arm of the LORD”? – Jesus is God flexing His muscle, God showing off His saving power to rescue a drowning world (51:9; 52:10).

+ Think about it: When God created the universe, it was the “work of His fingers” (Ps. 8, etc.). – But when God wanted to perform His greatest work, His highest & best work, even more than speaking a universe into existence in a mere 6 days. –

When God wanted to save doomed sinners and restore them to Himself, it would not be merely the ‘work of His fingers’. – Oh no, He would (as it were) put His whole arm into the work of salvation!

HOW THEN does a dying world respond to such a message of life? Surely a terminally ill person would jump at the offer of a guaranteed cure, right?...

Look at how the NT interprets & applies this verse? – It is used twice. – Turn first to John 12…

(a) Jesus has just performed his last & most stunning miracle of his earthly ministry, Jn. 11, raising Lazarus, who’d been dead 4 days. – But still they rejected Jesus & wanted all the more to kill Him. – So look at how John sums up Jesus’ entire 3-year ministry:

Read Jn. 12:37-41…

Few would believe. – Few would want to see God’s arm revealed. – They were guilty for such hard-hearted unbelief. – Yet it was all part of God’s sovereign plan, predicted some 700 yrs earlier through Isaiah.

(b) Paul says the same: Rom. 10:13-16 – They heard it but rejected (cf. Rom. 10:20-21, also qtg Isaiah)…

Turn back to Isa. 53…

🡪How does this apply to US? – If *Christ Himself* got this kind of resistance, what should we expect? Jesus was the most Spirit-filled, eloquent, persuasive evangelist ever, God incarnate, yet still: v. 1...

And if the *apostles*, as eyewitnesses, with all their miracles & boldness, got the same scorn as Jesus – who are we to expect less?!...

v. 2a – Jesus grew up “before God”, coram Deo, before the gaze of God, ever & always fearing & loving & please His Father. –

And God knew that this was no ordinary little branch. – Oh no, He was the prophesied “Branch of the LORD” (Isa. 4:2), the promised “shoot that would spring from the stem of Jesse, a branch from his roots that would bear fruit…the Root of Jesse”.

🡪This Branch would be the only hope of the nations. – If you do not hold on to this Branch and hang from this Branch (with both hands, with all you’ve got), you will fall into the Abyss and burn foreverd(Isa. 11:1, 10; Rom. 15:12)

+ YET in the eyes of man, Jesus was but a “tender shoot” = i.e., a little suckling or shoot on a trunk or branch, a brand new twig just shooting forth at springtime. – I.e., the sucklings that you *cut off* & throw away, so they won’t weaken the plant…

+ AND, v. 2b: Christ was like a root out of parched ground – some little desert growth that looks doomed to an early death, small chance of surviving. –

Jesus was born of a lowly maiden, raised in humble conditions in a rural village. – Not the usual stuff of royalty & greatness.

v. 2cde – In every age, the world believes that beauty is a prerequisite for greatness. – Success requires more than just good looks, but not less. – Except that we read this about Jesus, the most successful Man in history…

I.e., Isaiah is saying, ‘He’s a country bumpkin. Nothing to write home about. Nothing striking about Him at first glance. Not the kind of person at a party that you’d just want to walk up to and meet. Not the guy Hollywood would choose for the lead role in a movie.’

‘Probably not the guy they’d even choose to play Jesus in a Jesus movie. And He definitely wouldn’t qualify to be a televangelist or prosperity preacher today whose got the billboard, glossy-cover, made-for-TV sort of face and that radio-style voice.’

Scornful remarks in the gospels come to mind, e.g., “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn. 1). – “‘Is this not the carpenter’s son?, the son of Mary, and brother of James & Joses & Judas & Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at Him.” –

The Stone that makes men stumble, and the Rock that makes men fall….

v. 3 – NB, “despised” repeated 2x, framing the whole verse.

No one has ever tasted rejection like Jesus. – No one was de-friended, alienated, or ridiculed more than Jesus. –

NOT just the religious leaders, but also the fickle crowds, plus His very own family & relatives, plus His own beloved disciples – all abandoned Him in the end, every last one of them. – In His hour of greatest need, Christ was left all alone, friendless & forgotten.

And this was but *one* of the countless “sorrows” that He knew. Human disdain & disapproval was just one of many, many “griefs” with which He was “acquainted”, His ‘familiar sufferings’ (NIV). –

Throughout the Gospels, we see the emotions of Jesus. – Often we see His compassion and sorrow – over the sick & hurting, over a lost humanity (the crowds, Jerusalem, the rich young ruler), over the tomb of Lazarus, a close friend – “Jesus wept”, Jn. 11.

*Man of sorrows, what a name*

*For the Son of God who came*

*Ruined sinners to reclaim*

*Hallelujah, what a Saviour!*

+ Still Christ is despised & rejected today – nothing much has changed: The world abuses Christ’s name more severely than Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Pol-Pot, Ghaddafi & Saddam & Bin-Laden, combined!

Many Jewish people hate Jesus more than Satan himself. – They refuse to utter His name, instead just calling Him ‘that man, the hanged one, the bastard or illegitimate one’.

🡪But Christ is also despised by those who think they pay Him a courtesy of respect, ‘Oh, I have no issue with Jesus, I have nothing against Him, I’m just not a Christian, I’m not particularly interested in Him.’ – Friend, indifference is its own kind of insult.

🡪OR by the Hindu or Muslim who say, ‘Jesus was a wise teacher, a great prophet, good ethics, social reformer, etc.’. – But that is impossible and a contradiction against all that Jesus actually claimed about Himself. – This wise Teacher & great Prophet also claimed to be the very Son of God, who died for our sins and who rose again on the 3rd day. –

If you do not accept the full Jesus of the Bible as Lord & Saviour, then don’t insult Him with mere compliments. – Admit that Christ was either a false prophet & liar, or He was a lunatic and out of His mind….

NB, vv. 2-3 give the whole life story of Jesus, from the cradle to the grave – recognised by God, but unrecognised by men; known by His Father, unknown to humanity; treasured by Heaven, rejected by earth (and by Hell)….

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NB someone else has crept into Isaiah’s story here, another actor in the drama: vv.2de, 3d… (“we…us…we”) –

Isaiah includes himself and the rest of US in the mass of sinful humanity, the guilty crowd of Christ-haters, the Jesus-rejectors. – Those who loved the darkness rather the light, because their deeds were evil (Jn. 3).

🡪What an indictment on human stupidity. – That in love & mercy, God gave us His choice Servant, His very own Son, sent to save us, this One so powerful that He would “sprinkle many nations” (52:15) and reach the ends of the earth with His salvation, the Branch of the LORD (cf. Isa. 42, this Gentle One did not raise His voice, who would not break or snuff out, etc.). –

YET, yet, we looked at Him, assed His value to us, computed His worth, and the sum total was?...Zero, zilch, nothing, nada, worthless. –

We looked at the greatest gift Heaven could give, and saw “no beauty” in Him. – We looked at the God-man, THE Majestic One, and saw “no majesty” in Him. – We “hid our faces” as if it was some hideous thing, not a loving Saviour.

The fact that we could draw such false, blind, insane conclusions about Christ – it reveals a LOT more about us than it does about Christ. – He is not on trial; we are.

🡪This is what total depravity means, vv. 1-3, we are corrupt in every part of our humanity: our emotions reject God, our wills choose sin instead, our minds cannot discern true beauty. – Every avenue by which we should have known God has been blocked by our total depravity, our utter inability ever to discover God. –

As we say in our Decl. of Faith, we believe that “man is radically depraved in all areas of life and is spiritually dead and utterly incapable of pleasing God or saving himself, and thus is hopelessly lost”…. “*unless God intervenes*”, unless God acts & God reveals Christ to us!...

🡪Beloved, an important lesson for us in how we do church and how we witness:

*Sinners will not truly be attracted to Christ until they see their sin. – Sinners will not be drawn to Jesus in a real & saving way except through the faithful proclaiming of the gospel, which is God’s only power to save.* (Rom. 1:16)

I.E., Don’t try to dress up the gospel & make it more attractive. Don’t leave out the sin & repentance part & just major on the benefits of salvation, or how Christians are actually quite cool & fun to be with, or how Jesus will enhance your life, improve your health, enrich your marriage, or increase your prosperity. –

Don’t try to dress up Jesus or dumb-down church to attract unbelievers. – *Because IF YOU DO, guess what you’ll attract?* –

False converts of a false Jesus attending a false church. – People who just learn to have fun at church and act religious, but who are never truly convicted of sin or called to repentance and complete surrender of their whole life to Jesus as Lord & King.

We do NOT need to help people like us or like our Jesus. – Sure, we should avoid any distraction, or any other offense than the gospel itself – absolutely. – But we cannot make unsaved, unregenerate, spiritually dead people be truly attracted to Jesus.

*They will only love Christ once they have been broken over their sin and crushed in repentance, through our faithful preaching of the gospel.* – For this we pray, for this we labour!

UNTIL sinners are converted & given a new nature, Isaiah’s words will remain true of them: vv. 1a, 2d, 3a,d…

v. 3 leaves us asking, ‘Why was this Servant characterised by griefs and sorrows? Was it only b/c of human rejection, or is there much more going on here? Was it just a problem of false perceptions, was that why they rejected Jesus, or was it a deeper reason?...’ – Now Isaiah explains.

CONCL. & Prayed…