**Jesus in the Servant Songs of Isaiah**

**Song # 4 – Is. 52:13 – 53:12**

Over the past several weeks, we’ve been looking at what are called the Four Servant Songs of Isaiah, poems that speak of a special Person who was to come into the world. For centuries, Jewish rabbis and scholars have pondered these songs, wondering of whom they spoke, and they’ve come up with various theories. But neither Israel as a nation, nor any particular Jewish person of history has ever really fulfilled these prophecies. No one, that is, except Jesus of Nazareth! He fulfills them so perfectly and completely that it is a powerful testimony to the foreknowledge and the power of God when we recognize it. I believe it can strengthen our faith, and I believe it gives us a very clear message or testimony that we need to share with people everywhere, especially with Jews. Today we’ll unpack the fourth and final song. What we’ll see makes it clearer than ever that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Suffering Servant of God.

The fourth and final Servant Song appears after a long section (51:9 – 52:12) which promises restoration, deliverance from the punishments and calamities which have overtaken Israel, freedom from captivity, and retribution to those who have so long opposed God’s people. Suddenly, the Servant is again introduced with words of high honor, yet along with this honor, very disturbing and mysterious suffering, sorrow, and calamity almost beyond description. In this song, more detail about the way in which the Servant will save is given, and as we’ll see, it’s detail that would have been virtually impossible to decipher or decode at the time it was first delivered through the prophet.

**Is. 52:13-15** 13See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. 14Just as there were many who were appalled at him — his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness — 15 so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

The first verse of the song speaks of the wisdom of the Servant and His high exaltation. But the very next verse is the complete opposite of that! People will be astonished when they see how disfigured and damaged the Servant’s very visage and form will become. Verse 15 has a Hebrew word “yazeh,” which in some versions is translated “sprinkle” and in others “startle.” According to various commentaries, either translation is appropriate. (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown; Keil and Delitzsch Commentary, electronic versions)

The concept of sprinkling seems to relate to the sprinkling of the blood of a sacrifice, as when Moses sprinkled all the people of Israel, as well as the priests and the various items of the Tabernacle with blood. (Ex. 24:6, 8) If this is the proper translation, it would speak of the Servant somehow sprinkling blood (His own), to atone for the sins of people from all nations, or perhaps, the sprinkling of water to purify them.

The other interpretation, “startle,” is also appropriate, for the Servant’s ordeal will be such a spectacle of suffering as to shock people. Verse 14 says many would be appalled or astonished at Him as they beheld the horror He had to endure. His suffering will be way beyond anything ordinary! In fact, as Is. 53:1-3 says, many will have great difficulty believing and accepting the message of the Suffering Servant. (read)

**53:1-3** Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Who could believe such a story? This Servant will grow up like a root out of dry ground, (surely a reference to Isaiah’s earlier prophecy (11:1, of a new shoot coming out of the stump of Jesse.) He will not exhibit outward attractiveness or importance. He will be despised, rejected, and acquainted with sorrows. Many will actually hide their faces from Him in shame, not wanting to identify with such pain and humiliation.

However, the following section, 53:4-12, makes it clear that the suffering this Servant will endure will not be due to any sin or guilt on His own part which is puzzling, yet crucial.

**53:4-6** 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The Servant’s suffering will be *vicarious* suffering, designed by God to atone for the sins of those who have not been faithful to God. The Servant will be wounded for *our* transgressions, bruised for *our* iniquities, punished so that *we* might have peace. By His wounds and the terrible punishment He will endure, healing will come to *us*. God will actually lay *our* iniquity upon the Servant, since *we* have *all* gone astray like sheep. (vs. 6)

**53:7-8** 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

There will be a perversion of justice in the way this Servant is treated as He is oppressed and afflicted and cut off from the land of the living. And notice He is led like a lamb to the slaughter, yet doesn’t speak in His own defense. Again, all not for His own sin or guilt, but for the transgression of God’s people. John the Baptist pointed Jesus out in the crowd as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (Jn. 1:29) Pontius Pilate was amazed that Jesus said nothing in His own defense.

**53:9** He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

He will somehow make His grave with the wicked, but also with the rich, even though He Himself will have done no violence and told no falsehoods. Jesus, though completely innocent, died between two thieves and was buried in a rich man’s tomb.

**53:10, 11** 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

This is such a crucial, yet puzzling passage! It will be God’s will to crush His Servant, this totally innocent man! Jesus asked His Father if it was really necessary for Him to “drink the cup” that was being offered in Gethsemane, and became convinced it was. Here in Isaiah, we see why. Verse 10 says His life would actually be made an offering for sin, as a fulfillment of every animal sacrifice ever offered during centuries of Jewish temple worship. Heb. 10:5-10 explains how Jesus accepted His Father’s will and offered His body as a sacrifice of atonement to bring us to God. The will of the Lord prospered and was fully carried out by His life and death. By His knowledge, meaning either by His experience of pain and suffering, or by the knowledge of Him, this totally righteous Servant of God would justify many, by bearing their iniquities.

This section is such a paradox, because even though His life would be given as a guilt offering, which certainly means He would die, we’re told He will see His offspring and prolong His days? And *after* the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied? How could these totally contradictory things be true? Or how could 52:12 be true, that on one hand, He’ll be highly exalted, and on the other, so disfigured people will be appalled at Him?!

**Is. 53:12** Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. NIV

Again, this is such a paradox! God will give Him a portion among the great and He’ll divide the spoils with the strong, because He poured out His life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors? Those two just can’t go together in any normal, human way of thinking! You’re either exalted and great and you divide the spoils and you see your offspring and the light of life and you prolong your days, or, you pour out your life unto death and are numbered with transgressors! You’re either righteous and blessed and things go well for you and you prolong your days, or you’re a transgressor and you’re cursed and you’re cut off from the land of the living. You can’t have it both ways, right?

Now we can understand why this final Servant Song was completely mystifying to the people of Isaiah’s time, to the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ time, even to Jesus’ own disciples at first, and certainly to most Jews still today. Again, the question must be asked, could Israel as a nation have fulfilled this passage? Could any particular Jewish person of history have experienced what is described in this song for what is clearly a redemptive purpose? Could anyone have been so cursed and cut off and despised, rejected, and smitten by God Himself, and yet be highly honored and exalted and bring redemption and light to the nations and actually justify many?

Were it not for the New Testament, we certainly could not know! But this passage is referred to over and over there (I can list 7 places: Matt. 8:17; Lu. 22:37; Jn. 12:38; Acts 8:27-35; Ro. 10:16; Ro. 15:21; 1 Pet. 2:21-25) The prophecy describes the ministry and especially the final passion of Jesus of Nazareth so easily and adequately, with no forcing of the meaning or imaginative speculations needed. Jesus alone fulfills the picture of the Suffering Servant so clearly “painted” by Isaiah.

The New Testament makes it plain that, in the agony of His passion, He was made to be a sin offering for us, though He knew no sin. (2 Cor. 5:21) He bore the curse of sin for us, so that we might experience the blessing of Abraham. (Gal. 3:13, 14) Though He Himself committed no sins, He bore our sins in His own body, and by the stripes placed upon His back by scourging, we ourselves have been spiritually healed. Though we were going astray like sheep, the Lord has brought us back to Himself through Christ. (1 Pet. 2:21-25) Though He never married and had any physical children, Jesus has certainly “seen” His offspring, currently numbered at some 2.2 billion in all the world! God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name above all others.

These prophecies are clear predictions of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and no other! And God had them written for a clear purpose. We’re to understand that purpose and make sure we’ve applied it to our own lives personally!

How do we do that? First, by simply believing the message. Isaiah asks in 53:1, “Who has believed our report?”

The Bible says in Is. 53:12 that by knowledge of the Servant we are justified, and in Ro. 5:1 that we are justified by our faith in Him. here Have you been justified? Have you made this your own? I urge you to believe and receive today by talking directly with the God who did all of this for you and for me, confessing your sins and your faith in Jesus, and believing He makes you just in His sight.

I would also urge you to share this message with others. These songs were given by inspiration of God. What the Servant would do was predicted in detail, and then, in the NT, we have the record of how it was carried out in space and time. This is a powerful testimony, a one-two punch, we need to share with others.

On the one hand, it shows us the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God, that He would have this written down over 7 centuries before it happened, so He could know and predict these things accurately and clearly.

On the other hand, it also shows us that we human beings are sinners, unable to save ourselves. For God would surely not have gone to all the trouble of sending His only Son, in the form of His suffering Servant, the “arm of the Lord,” to this earth to “stand in the gap” between a holy God and a fallen, sinful race if it hadn’t been absolutely necessary. He had to make intercession, suffering in our place, so that our sins and rebellion could be atoned for and swept away, and we could be reconciled to God.

This message cannot be kept only to ourselves! It was meant to be shared with people of all nations, “to the Jew first, and also with the Gentile.” (Ro. 1:16)

I pray you’ll take the message of these songs to heart and make them your own, so that you can be justified by faith in the Suffering Servant, and stand ready to share His message whenever and with whomever the opportunity might arise. This story is the best news of all time, and it’s the only way any of us can be saved and inherit eternal life with God.