

**Advent #4: The Plan**<sup>1</sup>  
**Isaiah 53**  
**ABC 12/29/19**

Use your imaginary time machines & go back with me one week. Today is the Sunday before Christmas, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent. I'm not sick in bed. Christmas Eve hasn't happened yet & we haven't talked about The Present God gave us with the birth of Jesus. We can't talk about Advent without including what God's plan of the incarnation of Jesus was. That's what we'll look at today. Believe it or not, we'll still be looking at Advent again next Sunday as we finish off the series with seeing what God's Pleasure was in His sending of His Son.

As we started Advent this year I said we can't start in the middle of the Christmas story & understand it. We can't just focus on a Baby in a manger & know the complete story. We have to understand that the gift of Jesus is rooted in the grief of God at mankind's sin (Gen 6:6). We all have a sin problem. What hope is there for those who've rebelled against God? Our hope isn't in finding our own way back. Left on our own, we not only can't find our way back, we have no desire to do so. Left on our own we'd sink deeper & deeper into sin, incur greater guilt, & be lost forever. We can do nothing to fix this. But God can & does. Throughout the OT we have the promise of a coming Redeemer who would buy us out of our slavery to sin. Two weeks ago we looked at the proclamation of the angels & that very familiar Christmas vs, **Glory to God in the highest, & on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased** (Lk 2:14). The angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus would bring glory to God & peace to those that God's grace is given. But it's not just an announcement of a birth but also the prediction of a death. That was God's plan from the beginning, the only plan that could both satisfy God's holy justice & His amazing love. Turn to Isaiah 52-53. This is an amazing portion of Scripture as it records the details that were played out in Jesus' birth, death, & exaltation 700 years before it happened. The Triune God was committed to the plan They had put together in eternity past.

In his book *One Crowded Hour*, Tim Bowden describes an incident in Borneo in 1964. Nepalese fighters were asked if they'd be willing to jump from airplanes into combat against the Indonesians. Clearly, they didn't understand what was involved, but bravely said they would, asking only that the plane fly slowly over a swampy area & no higher than 100 feet. When they

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<sup>1</sup> This Advent series adapted from Paul David Tripp's Advent sermons from 2010

were told that the parachutes wouldn't have time to open at that height, they replied, *Parachutes? You didn't mention parachutes before!*

That's commitment! But in the life & death of our Lord Jesus Christ we see an even greater commitment to His heavenly Father & their plan to fulfill the promise to our problem of sin. Beginning in Isaiah 52:13 & running through chpt 53, is the song of the Servant, the Messiah, who is promised by God to come to bring salvation to His people. It's also the most complete prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ anywhere on the pages of the OT. **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** PRAY

This is a crystal-clear prophecy about the ministry, death, resurrection, & coronation of the Messiah, written more than 7 centuries before He came. It's the gospel according to God. Of all the OT's messianic prophecies, this one stands out for its richness & clarity. In particular, Isaiah paints a precise portrait of our Savior's sufferings. He explains in detail the true meaning of the Messiah's death as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of His people. Many key details from the events surrounding the death of Messiah are given here. For example, Isaiah speaks of the brutality of the wounds that were inflicted on Him (52:14), His silence before His accusers (53:7), His death (8-9), the place of His burial (9), & the ultimate triumph of His finished work (11). It even alludes to His resurrection (10). The passage is also loaded with doctrinal themes: substitutionary sacrifice (4-6, 10), the forgiveness of sins through the shedding of blood (5), the sinlessness of this **despised & rejected** Servant who dies for His people (9), the initiative of God in providing atonement for sinners (10-11), the justification of many (11), & the intercessory work of the One who offers Himself as a sacrifice (12). In fact, nowhere in the OT does the gospel of Jesus shine more clearly than here. This isn't only a beautiful revelation of Jesus' saving death in the place of sinners, but also a stunning validation of its truth. He not only died for sinners so we could be saved, He died for sinners in fulfillment of prophecy so we could know more surely that we are saved. This is the most important truth ever given. It's nothing less than the good news of salvation for sinners by the death of the Servant of Yahweh, the only acceptable sacrifice to take away the sins of the world. What happened to Jesus on this earth in His incarnation was the plan of God. It wasn't a surprise nor a plan B. It was the plan & purpose of God.

The passage is divided into 5 stanzas of 3 vs each. The 1<sup>st</sup> line of each gives a summary of that section. In fact, the 1<sup>st</sup> stanza, 52:13-15, gives a summary of the whole section.

**1. Suffering Leads to Glory** (52:13-15) Isaiah 52:13 begins with the word, **Behold**. This is God speaking, the Lord Yahweh, Jehovah Himself. What does He say? **13-15**

**A. The Servant Exalted** (13). Who is this Servant? This Servant is clearly God because vs 13 says, **He will be high & lifted up & greatly exalted**. All 3 of those verbs are used to describe God Himself in Isaiah 6:1 (33:10; 57:15). & John says the vision in Isaiah 6 of God high & lifted up & sitting on a throne & holy, holy, holy, was a vision of Jesus Christ (Jn 12:38-41). Peter quotes Isaiah 53:5 & applies it to Jesus (1 Pt 2:21-24). He says in 1 Pt 1:10-11, **the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches & inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ & the glories to follow**. In Acts 8 the Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah 53 when Philip joined him. The eunuch asked, **Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?** & Luke tells us, **Philip opened his mouth, & beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him** (Acts 8:35). Clearly, this is Jesus the Messiah. This Servant is God Himself. Vs 13 says this Servant will **prosper** as God intends Him to.

**B. The Exaltation Through Humiliation** (14-15) The theme announced in vs 13 is developed in 14-15. The exaltation follows humiliation. In vs 14 they were astonished because His form & appearance were so **marred**. That describes a spoiling, a destruction, an appearance-changing affliction. The exaltation is reported in vs 15. Kings are astonished that He, of all people, should be so exalted. When they see God's plan at work, they'll realize that this suffering Servant will be exalted.

**2. Suffering is Offensive** (53:1-3) The 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza begins to trace the development of the suffering by showing it raises disbelief & thoughtfulness in the people who observe it.

**A. Did Not Believe It** (1). If we paraphrased vs 1 we'd say something like, *No one ever imagined this*. The vs is expressed in the form of questions. If they'd reflect on the suffering Servant they'd realize God was at work fulfilling His promises. But that realization would take belief & revelation.

But Israel couldn't then & many today can't believe such suffering was at the heart of God's redemptive plan.

**B. Suffering is Observed** (2-3) His beginnings were thought to be insignificant & His sufferings were offensive. Vs 2 describes His beginnings **like a tender shoot & like a root out of parched ground**. Who would have thought a **carpenter's son** (Mt 13:55) from Nazareth would figure prominently in God's plan. There was nothing appealing or attractive in His appearance that would make people rally to Him. He was **despised**, looked down on, held in contempt, as well as **forsaken** & rejected. His life was filled with grief & sorrows. The suffering Servant Himself shared the suffering of the world so He might redeem the world.

**3. Suffering is Vicarious** (4-6) The 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza reflects a staggering awakening, a sudden realization of why God's Servant had to suffer such humiliating agony. It isn't only the theological key to this passage, it's also the core of everything Scripture teaches about how our problem with sin is atoned for. Jesus' sufferings weren't without purpose. His suffering, while undeserved, was done vicariously.

**A. Suffering is Punishment** The suffering of the Servant was by the hand of God. Why? The reason was sin, yet the sin wasn't His, but ours. Vs 4 makes this clear & vss 5 & 6 amplify it. The sufferings described in this passage include the outpouring of God's wrath in righteous retribution for the sins of those who rebel against Him. He was indeed **stricken, smitten by God, & afflicted** (4). In other words, the Servant's wounding & crushing weren't merely unintended side effects of our sin. He was no martyr. He wasn't an accidental victim. His sufferings aren't collateral damage somehow caused by a chain of events set in motion by mistake. Isaiah is describing a purposeful act of penal substitution carried out by the sovereign will of God the Father.

**B. The Punishment is Redemptive** (5-6) Note the parallelism of **vs 5**:

The contrast is between **Him** & **us**. All His suffering was because of our rebellion & sin. If you find this shocking, that's precisely the point. The price our Savior paid to redeem His people from the guilt & bondage of sin was horrific. Scripture never tries to soften the dreadful aspects of this

truth, especially if it means toning down the awful reality of the righteous wrath of God. *Crushing* has to do with the physical suffering of Christ. Every moment of Christ's life was physical suffering. He didn't just begin to suffer on the cross; His whole life was one of suffering. The manger began His suffering; He suffered every day as He subjected Himself to the harsh realities of life in a fallen world. But there was emotional suffering as well. That's the **grief** in vs 10. He was despised, rejected, pierced, crushed, chastened, scourged, & it all reached a crescendo on the cross when He cried out, **My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** (Mk 15:34).

Isaiah explains the purpose of this vicarious or substitutionary suffering as redemptive with the phrase, **the chastening for our well-being or peace & by His scourgings we are healed**. This **well-being**, this peace & healing is ours because of His suffering. The pain was His because of the sin that was ours. In other words, the suffering was in our place. The vicarious anguish He endured brought spiritual healing & peace to us. His suffering was redemptive. We see this again in vs **6**.

The vs begins & ends with **all**. Substitutionary suffering of this Servant touches all who've sinned, which includes every one of us. That's mankind's problem. That's our problem. & this is God's plan. A 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam had to come. The 1<sup>st</sup> Adam had failed & so a 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam had to come. Jesus is that 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam, & He had to be willing to live in the middle of the harsh realities & the temptations of life in a fallen world. But His vicarious suffering wasn't a curse. It's a service to God & is based on love. His suffering removes sin. Remember Moses interceding for his sinful people, asking God to take his life so wrath could be averted from those worshiping the golden calf (Ex 32:30-35)? That's noble & unselfish but it can't remove sin. What all human vicarious suffering had failed to do, what all the sacrifices offered daily failed to do, the suffering of our Lord accomplished. Seven centuries after this was written Jesus came & fulfilled this prophecy completely. This was God's plan to solve or problem. It's what He'd promised & proclaimed. His Son's vicarious suffering was for our good, our well-being, so that our peace with God could be redeemed. But He had to be willing to be obedient in every way, in every thought, in every desire, in every word, & every action. He must be obedient so as He goes to the cross, He is the perfect Lamb of God who can now carry our sins, satisfy the anger of God so we could receive

forgiveness, acceptance into the family of God, righteousness given to us through Christ, & eternal life. That's the plan.

We had a problem we couldn't solve. It's called sin. We can't escape or defeat it. We needed to be rescued. That's why the promise of a Savior is so precious. & so, from day one, that little Baby was destined to die. But the cross isn't a moment of defeat, it was God's plan. He came to be the sacrificial Lamb. He came to be the offering that would satisfy God's wrath. In that one cruel death, life would be given to many, that there'd be a world-wide family of every language group, & every location of the globe, of every period of history, who would be given new life through the death of His Son. What a plan! One death & innumerable lives being given! When God placed this mission in the hands of Jesus, He put it in good hands. Jesus would be faithful; He'd do everything the Father asked Him to do, & in so doing, would provide for us not only eternal life, but eternal hope. Jesus was faithful. He was willing. Never even for a brief moment did He reconsider. He accepted His Father's will & through Him, our problem is solved.

**4. Suffering is Accepted** (53:7-9) If the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza announced it was for the sins of the people the Servant suffered, this stanza declares He Himself was sinless, & yet silently submitted to all the injustice laid on Him.

#### **A. Servant is Silent 7**

Although He was oppressed & being led to slaughter, He didn't open His mouth. Why was this Servant silent under suffering? Because He knew the truth. It had been said of Him, **My servant will prosper** (52:13). He knew what He was about. He had no guilt of His own & no doubts of God. He knew it wasn't punishment He was enduring for Himself, but a service He was performing, one given Him by God, a service for our salvation, a service sure of results that were glorious.

**B. Servant is Innocent** In vss 8-9 the prophet says the Servant was innocent. He'd done no violence & no guile was found in Him. Yet He was taken to judgment. It was judicial murder & they gave Him a convict's grave. On this note the stanza ends. He was innocent, but He willingly submitted to an oppression that carried Him to a humiliating death & burial. From all appearances, an innocent Man's life ended fruitlessly. But nothing could be further from the

truth. This was God's plan. Nothing less than the vicarious, substitutionary, sacrificial atonement of Christ in the place of sinners. He, the sinless Son of God, was made sin for us. He bore in His body our sins on the cross. The Lord was pleased to crush Him even though there's no violence or deceit in His mouth (9). In other words, He's perfectly holy, perfectly righteous, & perfectly sinless. In spite of His sinlessness, God is pleased to crush Him, His own Son, putting Him to grief. Why? Because that was the plan.

**5. Suffering was Effective** (53:10-12) It appeared to many that the death of this Servant was a tragedy. It was a perversion of justice. People might see & think God forsakes His own. On the contrary, the 5<sup>th</sup> stanza tells us God's will & pleasure was in it.

**A. Suffering was God's Will** (10) **The Lord was pleased to crush Him** begins the theological explanation of the suffering. **Pleased** doesn't mean enjoyment, but God willed the suffering, it was His plan coming to fruition. The Lord is doing something to Him that is horrific. Men, of course, are unjustly crushing Him. They're doing the worst they can do with an unjust trial & brutality & abuse & harassment & punching & slapping & hitting & crowning with thorns & nailing & piercing. Men are doing the worst they can do, & they're pleased to do that. But here, God is pleased & delighted to crush Him. While men are doing the worst they can do, at the very same time God is doing the best He can do. Jesus' death is God's work. He is God's Lamb & the purpose & counsel of God has determined that He will die. It is God who laid on Him the iniquity of us all. It is God who crushes Him. It is God who cuts Him off out of the land of the living. God, who finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked, as Ezekiel 18 says, finds pleasure in the death of the **Righteous One** (11). God, who finds no pleasure in the death of sinners, finds full pleasure in the death of the sinless One. He's crushed agonizingly, painfully, excruciatingly, & God is doing the crushing. The words translated **pierced** & **crushed**, according to one Hebrew scholar, are...

*...two of the strongest words in the Hebrew language to describe a violent & painful death. "Pierced" conveys the idea of "pierced through, or wounded to death" (cf. Deut. 21:1; Isa. 51:9; see also Psa. 22:16; Zech. 12:10; John 19:34).... "Crushed" conveys the sense of "beaten in*

*pieces, destroyed." The Servant is thus crushed to death by the burden of the sin of others which He took on Himself, further weighted by the wrath of God due that sin.<sup>2</sup>*

All this done because it was God's plan to solve our problem.

**B. Suffering was for Our Justification** (10b-11) This suffering was powerful to bring about its intended results, the justification of sinners. God made this Servant a sin or **guilt offering** for many, so that by their knowledge of Him they might be justified. The **guilt offering** was the only OT sacrifice that was intended to atone for sin (Lev 5:16, 18: 7:7). The Servant's death is presented as such an atoning sacrifice. In the sin offering you had the recognition of sin bringing death & the hope of a substitute (Lev 4). But in the **guilt offering**, because the whole animal was put on the altar, there was the picture of completion or complete satisfaction (Lev 5). The offering of Jesus was the **guilt offering** in the sense it was a complete offering. It provided full satisfaction. The debt is fully paid & the sinner set free. The sacrifice of the Servant as the full, atoning payment given to God to satisfy His holy justice & to pay in full the penalty for all the sins of all who'd ever believe. John says, **He's the propitiation for our sins** (1 Jn 2:2), the guilt offering that satisfies God for the sins of His people. Jesus' sinless death provided the complete satisfaction, the complete sacrifice to which nothing can be added. God's justice is satisfied. If God's justice is satisfied, what happens to the sacrifice? The Servant dies for others & then stays dead? No, the middle of vs 10 says, **He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, & the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul He will see it & be satisfied.** What's going on here? He's been crushed, put to death, so how can He **see His offspring & prolong His days**? How can He **see it & be satisfied** (11)? He'd have to be alive, right? This is a statement of God's plan predicting not only the atoning death of Jesus but also His resurrection. This was all the plan of God. **He will see His offspring** (10). That's future tense. We'd all like to see the generations ahead, right? Some are blessed to see their grandchildren. Others their great-grandchildren. A few even their great-great-grandchildren. But that's about it. Maybe that's why we're so preoccupied with the ones behind us as well. Through DNA testing & genealogy databases you can check out generations of dead people that you've descended from.

<sup>2</sup> Duane F. Lindsey, *The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12*, Bibliotheca Sacra 140, no. 557 (Jan–Mar 1983): p 24



While that may be interesting, it's a bad substitute for the fact that you're not going to see the ones in the future. I'd love to see how God's Kingdom progresses & how my descendants & our church fit into the purposes of God in the future. But I won't. So if He, Jesus, sees His offspring, He's got to be alive for a long time, right? Like forever & He will be. He'll prolong His days. He'll see the generations in the future. He'll see them all because He's alive forevermore. He'd have to be alive, wouldn't He, to reign & be exalted? Hebrews 2:9 tells us, He **was made for a little while lower than the angels ... because of the suffering of death crowned with glory & honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.** Then vs 10 adds, **it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, & through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory.** In other words, He will see them all; all the ones He brings to glory He will see. In Jn 6 He says, **All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, & the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out** (Jn 6:37). He will live to see His posterity. He will see His bride complete. He will see His flock gathered into glory. That's what it said in 52:13, **My Servant will prosper.** Here His prosperity is indicated in the final phrase of vs 10, **The good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.** What's **the good pleasure of the Lord**? That through crushing Him He saves sinners. He will see it. Not only will He see it, He will do it. **The good pleasure of the Lord** will succeed, the work of Christ will be complete. God's pleasure is in saving sinners. To satisfy His pleasure in saving sinners, His Son had to die. That was His plan He brought to completion. He delights in crushing His Son so that He can delight in saving sinners who will forever & ever praise & glorify Him. All, this whole salvation, as Eph 1 says, is **to the praise of His glory (1:6).**

### **C. Suffering Leads to Exaltation 11-12**

With this the passage comes full circle. God was satisfied, He was pleased with the obedient suffering of the Servant, whom we know to be our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ. Because He bore the sins of many, because He made intercession for sinners in His self-sacrificing love, God appointed Him to honor & glory. **As the result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it & be satisfied.** What will He see? He'll see the plan to its completion. He'll see the good pleasure of the Lord succeed. He'll see His spiritual offspring. He'll see the redeemed gathered in. God is

satisfied by the atoning sacrifice of Christ, & Christ is equally satisfied by seeing all His children gathered around His throne forever. The spiritual offspring, the redeemed of all the ages, forever His bride, forever His sons & daughters, loving, worshiping, honoring, serving Him in His presence in the glories of eternal heaven. This Servant, though brought so low, was exalted. Though despised, rejected, & forgotten of men, He was most certain of finding His place of exaltation with God. Before Him every knee shall bow & every tongue confess that He is Lord (Phil 2:9-11). The passage closes the same way it starts, with the exaltation of the Servant.

This has been quick. We could, & maybe should, spend weeks unpacking all of this. But for today remember that all of us are sinful, guilty of perverting & violating God's law, & thus (in our fallen state) separated from Him & spiritually dead. But Jesus took on Himself His people's sin, guilt, grief, sorrow, & every other aspect of our fallenness. He voluntarily endured God's punishment for our evils. By doing so, He purchased peace & blessing from God for us. The suffering of Jesus was vicarious in a way that no other has or ever could be. He took our sins on Himself & made full atonement for them. While we were yet sinners, He died for us (Rom 5:8). He Himself knew no sin, but suffered, the just for the unjust, that we, sinners, might become righteous before God. Obviously, the suffering was substitutionary. While 53:3 makes clear He suffered as a **man of sorrows**, vs 4-6 reveal that His suffering wasn't for His own doing but in the place of others. The servant takes the chastisement of the many, who in exchange receive peace (53:5). His suffering is also atoning. Although the word *atonement* isn't used, the concept is clearly here. The language of guilt & iniquity (53:4-6) & sin itself (53:12), coupled with the language of substitution, recalls the entire sacrificial system of Israel. The Servant is portrayed as both the priest who makes an offering of atonement (52:15; 53:10) & the sin-bearing, sacrificial lamb Himself (53:4-7). He's the guilt offering (53:10), which according to the law of Moses would effect atonement & restore a covenant relationship with God (Lev 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10). In short, the suffering of the Servant provides a substitutionary atonement for **the many**, removing sin as well as its consequences & restoring a right relationship with God.

Isaiah reveals a stunning truth, one we might reject were it not so clearly presented. God inspired Isaiah not only to write about the suffering of the Messiah, but also to identify the true source of that suffering. The Messiah will suffer, not for His own failures & rebellion, but for ours. That is God's plan. Though God will use human instruments to nail Jesus to the cross, it's God Himself who will lay upon His beloved Son the sin of humanity as well as the punishment for that sin. Jesus won't be a helpless victim, but our willing Substitute. Isaiah wrote the story of our salvation in detail 700 years before it happened. God sent Jesus into the world not to be a teacher, although He taught. He didn't send Him to be a healer, although He healed. God sent His Son to become our substitute, the One who would bear our punishment in our place. That was His plan. & Jesus wasn't in the dark about it. He was in on the planning of it. He knew full well the purpose of His suffering, & willingly submitted to it as His service to God the Father in order to provide for us salvation. There is no peace with God apart from the chastisement that He, the sinless Son of God, bore. We have no healing for our souls, no removal of our sins, no justification before God, apart from the penal suffering of Christ, the substitutionary death in which He took our sins upon Himself. That is why the church worships & serves Him, He brought to us eternal life. This 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah prophesied it, & Jesus, in the fullness of time, fulfilled the prophecy. God's plan is nothing less than the gospel. This is the doctrine of justification by the imputation of our sins to the righteous One, the Servant of Jehovah who becomes the substitutionary sacrifice, dying in our place, taking the punishment given by God for our sins & for all the sins of all who will ever believe in Him.

Our problem? Sin. God's promise? A Redeemer. The angels' proclamation? God will be glorified & graciously give us peace with Him. How? What's the plan? A suffering Servant coming to earth to suffer & die in our place for our sins. God's present to us? Jesus Christ incarnation, life, death & resurrection. That's what Christmas is all about. Next week? God's pleasure. **The Lord was PLEASED to crush Him.** That phrase troubles many. We'll look at it as we conclude our advent series next week.