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“The Glory of the Suffering Servant”

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Series: *The Glory of Christmas*

Welcome & Scripture Reading: Good morning beloved! Merry Christmas to you and yours! What a privilege and a joy it is to gather this morning in the name and for the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ. We're here together because we long to bring honor and praise and glory to God for the work He has done through His Son to save us from our sins. So, we have a special service today to celebrate in a special way. We will sing together and read Scripture together and we will hear the choir present a portion of Handel's *Messiah* as they exalt the work of our Lord. And we will consider a portion of Isaiah's prophecy to further encourage our worship of Christ. So, we have prayed that this is a soul-enriching time as your view is filled with the glory of Christ.

We have quite a few visitors with us this morning, and we are so glad you are here. In fact, we are a little packed out as far as space goes, so if you would mind moving in closer to the middle of your pew that would help us tremendously get others some place to sit.

If you regularly attend Newton Bible Church I am sure you will check out the back of the bulletin for all the pertinent announcements for the next several weeks. The one that I certainly want to mention is our children's Sunday School program tonight. You will not want to miss their celebration of our Lord tonight – so join us again tonight at 6pm.

As we have gathered to bring our gifts of worship, let's inform our worship with the truths of Scripture. Isaiah 7 gives us a prophecy that is directly and perfectly fulfilled in our Lord's birth. So, I will read a section of Isaiah 7 and then its fulfillment found in Matthew 1.

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Isaiah 52, Isaiah chapter 52. I want to express our thanks as a church family for the work the choir and musicians have done to present portions of Handel's *Messiah* to us this morning. We truly have no idea the mountain of work you have put in to present those songs so excellently this morning – so thank you. We were encouraged and edified as our eyes were lifted to gaze upon our great Messiah.

George Handel's *Messiah* has certainly stood the test of time as one of the finest pieces of musical composition ever produced. The musical genius of Handel is combined with direct quotations from the King James Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer as the promise, fulfillment, and ultimate glory of the Messiah are told. It all began when Charles Jennens sent his manuscript to Handel in July of 1741. In a letter dated July 10, 1741, Jennens wrote to a friend and said, "I hope [Handel] will lay out his whole Genius & Skill upon it, that the Composition may excel all his former Compositions, as the Subject excels every other subject. The Subject is Messiah."

And indeed, that is the key to the greatness of Handel's *Messiah*. Yes, his musical composition is masterful and genius, but they merely serve as the beautiful gold ring which holds forth the

brightest diamond of all time – the Lord Jesus who is the Christ. It is a wonderful celebration of the most exceptional and excellent of all topics. And your celebration this Christmas season rises and falls based upon your view of Christ. To the extent that you know the glory of this Jesus as seen in his work on our behalf – to that extent you will know joy in your heart, peace with God, and true life in Him. And that is what we see in Isaiah's 4th servant song. We see the glory of Jesus Christ.

In the month of December, we have given our attention to these four prophetic songs in Isaiah. These prophetic words were written some 700 years before Jesus appeared in the manger in Bethlehem, and in Jesus they were completely fulfilled. What we see in this 4th servant song is the astoundingly accurate prophecy about the servant's suffering. This Messiah to come would be a Savior who would suffer. And this suffering would not be for the sake of his own sins, but for the sins of others. The song begins in 52:13 with the Lord speaking about his servant. And then in verse 1 the song shifts to the voice of the Jewish Nation speaking about this Jesus of Nazareth whom they first rejected, but who now they see is indeed their Messiah. Let's read this fourth servant song. *Read 52:13-53:12.*

In Handel's oratorio *Messiah*, there are three parts. The first part rehearses the prophecy of the Old Testament about the coming Messiah and then includes the annunciation to the shepherds that Messiah had come. It moves then to rejoice in some of the works of his public ministry on Earth. But then in the 2nd part the story moves quickly to the passion of Jesus – the suffering of Christ under the weight of sin. After rehearsing the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, Part 2 moves to his ascension and the subsequent spread of the Gospel around the world. And then in part 3 the story line moves to the general resurrection of all people and the judgment day which will follow. It concludes, as does the whole oratorio with a proclamation of the worthiness of the Lamb to receive glory and honor and power forever and ever. So, at the center of Handel's *Messiah* we have the cross. And this is at it should be. The same is true of Isaiah's prophecy. I have told you that these last 27 chapters reflect the New Testament in that they prophesy about the work of Jesus of which the New Testament gives us the details of fulfillment.

These last 27 chapters are also in three parts, and at the end of each section there is a recurring truth stated. And that truth, in the words of Isaiah 48:22 is, "There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked." This is an ominous and dark truth which is completely necessary as the backdrop for the prophecy of coming salvation. We need to know that we are in trouble before we can look to the Savior and live. And so, against the black backdrop of the coming judgment upon sin for all those who rebel against God, we are given this glorious song about a coming servant who will provide a way for us to be at peace with God. And at the center of this song we will find the cross of Christ – right where it should be.

Maybe you noticed as we read through the song that there are 5 stanzas of 3 verses each in this song. The first stanza is Jehovah talking about the final exaltation of his servant even though he will be astonishingly marred. His rise to the heights of undeniable Savior and Lord will shock the masses because in his earthly life he was astonishingly not Savior and Lord material. The middle 3 stanzas – verses 1-9 of chapter 53 – are written in the past tense, but they are prophesying a future event. This is called the prophetic perfect, and it could only come from the

mind of God. These words describe the work of Christ from the perspective of the repentant nation of Israel at the Second Coming of Christ. It is a day which is still yet future to us. There has never been a national turning and repentance of their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. But when Jesus bodily returns in all his glory at the Second Coming they will stand astonished and pierced through with conviction. Zechariah and the book of Revelation tell us that they, as a nation, will turn and receive this Messiah as their Savior and Lord. And when they do, this song – this fourth servant song – will be the on their lips. It is a song of praise and reflection and worship, but preeminently it is a song of repentance over previous unbelief. This one they have rejected for so long will finally be recognized as worthy of all the glory He is due.

This glory of Christ is seen in so many ways, but in the greatest way we see his glory by understanding the depths to which he stooped to be our Savior. We can easily get cute and trite with the saving work of Jesus. We can easily take for granted the magnitude of his sacrifice. We can easily exchange gifts with one another and eat great food together and sing together, all while giving little thought and small worship to the One who gave himself for us. So, for the rest of our time, which is short, I want to look at the middle verse of the middle stanza of this great servant song – verse 5 of Isaiah 53. This is the crux of the text – it is the bull's eye, dead center – and it is all about the Cross work of the Messiah. This babe in the manger in Bethlehem should be celebrated because of all that he was going to accomplish in life and in death. And the nucleus of that great and glorious work is explained for us in verses 4-6. This is the heart of the text which pumps blood to the rest.

They had considered this Jesus of Nazareth to be despised and rejected. He knew grief and he was a man of sorrows, and they had frankly determined that he was deserving of that. He was humble in origin and unknown in family honor or prestige. He was of low esteem and therefore was not considered to be much of anything. But that estimation is countered in verse 4 with the strongest possible language. Surely – truly – without a doubt – this one rejected is actually one who was bearing our griefs and our sorrows not his own. This is the great transition of repentant faith. It moves from looking down its long nose upon Jesus in judgment to a heart posture of complete humility as it understands the suffering of this servant as being its own doing.

The natural man's look upon Jesus is that he must have been smitten by God and condemned by God. And this is especially true when we gaze upon the grisly scene of the crucifixion of Jesus. It was a punishment refined by the most brutish of men to inflict the most severe amount of pain on the criminal without killing them in the process. They would be scourged with a cat of nine tails whip which would tear their flesh into mangled pieces. Just enough horrific punishment to cause unbearable pain, but not to bring death. Then came the agony of being hung on an execution stake by having nails driven through the wrists and through the feet so as to secure the condemned to the cross. All their weight on these pierced wounds would inflict shooting, severe and unending pain, but it would not kill them. The condemned would then have to leverage himself against the nails in his hands and feet so as to raise up his chest enough to let air into his lungs. Every breath became a gruesome challenge as the one being crucified teetered on the brink of death while still clinging to life. Finally, if the condemned lasted too long the legs

were broken so that he could no longer lift himself up to get a breath, and he would asphyxiate and die.

How could someone who was executed in this most gruesome way be even considered as a possible Savior of anyone? He did not just die, but he died the most horrific death known to mankind – the death of one condemned, despised, and rejected. The natural man cannot make sense of it. But through the eyes of faith which have been opened by the gracious work of God, we can see that this suffering was not for his sin, but for ours. And that is the message of verse 5. As the center of this truth about the suffering servant, verse 5 is the largest and most brilliant pearl in this string. And it communicates 4 truths – 2 about Jesus and 2 about us as sinners.

I. He was Pierced

- a. The first truth is that he was pierced. This is why the virgin Mary was given the God-man to carry in her womb. This is why Jesus emptied himself by becoming a man and taking upon himself the form of a servant. It was so that he could be pierced for our transgressions. Contrary to how it appeared, he was not on that cross because of what He had done, but because of what we had done. To be pierced is to be wounded with a fatal blow. It is language that Isaiah would have had no frame of reference for in his day. They didn't pierce people through in those days to execute them – they stoned them. So, this clearly prophetic text is foretelling the death of Jesus upon a Roman cross – and it is not coming from Isaiah's imagination, but from the mind and heart of God. This makes clear to us that Jesus was not caught up in some tragic accident. He didn't get squeezed out by a plan that went horrifically wrong. Rather, this was the plan from the beginning. He came so that he could be pierced.
- b. And the reason for this piercing blow is for the transgressions of believers. Remember that this is who is talking here. It is the believing nation of Israel at the Second Coming of Christ. They now finally understand why this Jesus of Nazareth went through the horrific death upon the cross. He was pierced through in our place. He took upon himself our transgressions. He was condemned for us – they are saying. God has finally opened their eyes of faith and it all makes sense now. Jesus died for them.
- c. Transgressions are a breach of relationship which happens when one party casts off allegiance to the other party. In this case, the Israelites had cast off loyalty to their God and had rebelled against his authority and had stepped outside the boundaries of their agreed upon relationship. In other words, they no longer wanted God as their God and they cast off the restraints of having to answer to him. And this left them under the judgment of a holy and righteous God. And we are no different. We too have sinned in this way. We too have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and we too have rebelled against His supreme authority.
- d. This is what Jesus took upon himself on the Cross. He took the full piercing blow that was due to others.

II. He was Crushed

- a. Not only was he pierced, but he was also crushed. This means to be beaten to pieces and destroyed. It means to be put under the full weight of the death blow.

And this crushing was for our iniquities. Those are the perversions of our sin. It is a general word describing the wickedness and corruptness of our sinful nature and behavior. This twisted and perverted and defiled nature of our sinfulness has earned the full weight of eternal judgment from the thrice holy God. He will not tolerate nor accommodate our sinfulness. He will not merely overlook or gently rebuke as though this iniquity does not matter. No, there is literally hell to pay for these sins.

- b. And this is what Jesus did upon the cross. He took the full weight of the wrath of God upon himself and he suffered under that punishment for our iniquity all the way to death itself. It crushed him to the point of taking his life as the consequence of our wickedness. On the cross, Jesus suffered under the weight of the eternal punishment that was due for our iniquities. As God in the flesh he bore that eternal wrath and drank it down to the dregs for us.

III. We have Peace with God

- a. And this cross work of Jesus accomplishes two things for believers. Verse 5 says that we have peace with God and we are healed. We have peace with God as a result of the chastisement that Jesus underwent. Chastisement is a word for the corrective discipline of the Lord. It is what the Exile in captivity was for the nation of Israel. It was the chastisement of the Lord for their sins. It was intended to purge and purify them of their evil and bring them back into faithfulness with the Lord.
- b. But ultimately, the full brunt of that chastisement was placed upon the God-man so that he could earn our peace with God. Peace with God is the ceasing of the hostilities between you and God. It is the cease fire that occurs when you are in Christ. He is no longer at odds with you. He is no longer going to turn his wrath upon you because there is therefore now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!
- c. But it is so much more than that. This peace is an all of life encompassing peace. It is a complete restoration of a right relationship. Not only is God no longer at odds with you because of your sin, but he now welcomes you into his family with open and loving arms. There is completeness and harmony and fullness of life in this peace that is now given through the crushing of the Son.
- d. So, think again about the last phrase that appears at the end of each of these 3 sections of Isaiah's prophecy – "There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked." But now, in the center of the middle section – so therefore in the center of all three sections there is this glorious truth made known – there is peace through the chastisement of the suffering servant. There is a way to be made right with God, and that is through His Son.

IV. We are Healed

- a. Not only are we given peace, but we are also healed. And this healing comes by the one who was himself wounded for us. Our illness is not physical or temporary. Our illness is so severe that it required the Son of God to take on human flesh, live in perfect sinlessness so that he could be wounded for our healing. The physician did not discover a cure and apply it to our sin-sick souls.

Rather, the physician took our sickness upon himself and was so fully under it that it took him to death on a cross. But he being without sin was able to fully and finally overcome sin through the resurrection from the dead. This slain lamb is the only cure for our completely depraved and sinful nature. By his wounds, we are healed.

Conclusion: The glory of the babe in the manger in Bethlehem is seen in the high cost he paid to secure our salvation. As you contemplate this Savior this week, I call you to deeply consider this costly cross work of Christ for you. If you already know this peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, then make this your most glorious Christmas ever by raising your estimation of this Savior higher than you have ever had it before. You cannot over-estimate the glory of this Christ! If you are still in your sins – if you are still the wandering sheep described in verse 6 where you demand to go your own way and do your own thing – then I call you to make this your best Christmas yet by bowing your knee in the humble submission of faith. The gift you need most this Christmas is the gift of God's Son and His finished work on the cross for you. Will today be the day of the salvation of your soul? Look to Him and live! If you do not, as the Lord says, "There is no peace for the wicked." And as Jesus himself said in John 3:36 – "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Let's pray!