

“Suffering Servant”

(PART 1)
Isaiah 53:1-6

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Introduction:

This morning and next Sunday morning, I would invite you to think with me about several questions that have been turned in by various members of this congregation, and I would like for us to try to answer these questions by looking together at a book from the Old Testament that has been referred to as the **“Gospel According to Isaiah.”** One of the questions was concerning the birth of Christ, someone else was asking about the crucifixion, one of our visitors was asking, **“Who is Jesus?”** someone else was asking whether Jesus ever laughed or smiled, and someone else was asking, **“Do we know what Jesus looks like?”** As I was thinking about some of these wide-ranging questions, I kept going back to an amazing prophecy about Jesus from the Old Testament book of **Isaiah**, and I refer to it as the **“Gospel According to Isaiah”** because there are so many prophecies concerning Jesus. In fact, out of the 66 chapters in the book of **Isaiah**, 47 of those chapters are either alluded to or are directly quoted by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. This morning, then, I would like for us to focus on a prophecy made in **Isaiah 53**—**»PPT»**—a prophecy concerning the Messiah—God’s own Son who would come in the form of a Suffering Servant more than 700 years in the future. In our pew Bibles, the passage starts on **page 1154**. This morning I would like for us to consider **verses 1-6**. We will consider the nation of Israel’s shock that the Messiah would come in such a common form, we will consider the fact that the Lord was widely rejected, and then finally we will start to consider the concept of Jesus being offered as a sacrifice for us. And, if the Lord wills, we will then move on to the second half of this chapter next week, as we consider the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection. This morning, though, let us please look together at **Isaiah 53:1-6**...

- 1 Who has believed our message?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?***
- 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.***
- 3 He was despised and forsaken of men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised,
and we did not esteem Him.***

- 4 *Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.*
- 5 *But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.*
- 6 *All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.*

I. **This morning, let us look first of all at verses 1-2 as we consider THE SHOCK AND AMAZEMENT THAT GOD'S OWN SON WOULD ARRIVE IN SUCH A COMMON WAY.** ▶PPT▶

We notice in **verse 1** that Isaiah starts off with a statement of disbelief, *“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed.”* The prophecy is so spectacular, but the prophet Isaiah almost seems to be shocked that the message will not be accepted. The emphasis is on the *“Who?”* And the implication seems to be that almost no one has believed our message! And I say this because of how John will later apply this prophecy. In **John 12:37-38**, John said, *“But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: ‘LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? ...’”* In other words: Virtually nobody has believed our report!

And then the prophet tells us why. He refers to the *“arm of the Lord”* being revealed. It was the arm of the Lord that brought the nation of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. And so the reason for the shock is that the coming of the Messiah is not what the people expected. The people were looking for something powerful, for something amazing, for a great political leader, a leader like Moses. And yet we know that when the Lord actually appeared, most people did not accept Him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and the reason is given in **Isaiah 53:2**, where the prophet says, *“For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground.”* In other words, the climate in Israel at the time of Christ was spiritually dry—the people had not heard a word from God for more than 400 years, the people were not thinking in a spiritual way.

And so when Jesus came onto the scene, the people were confused—they didn’t get it. I am reminded of the young woman who was at one time engaged to be married to Mozart before Mozart was famous, but impressed by more handsome men she broke it off and gave him up for someone taller and more attractive. Years later, when the world started to praise Mozart for his amazing musical ability, the woman regretted her decision and said, **“I knew nothing of the greatness of his genius. I only saw him as a little man.”** In a similar way, the Jews were looking for a handsome, powerful, leader (like Joseph, or Moses, or Saul, or David), but when they

saw the Lord they could not handle the truth. In fact, they stumbled over it—they failed to understand.

Going back to the question, therefore, regarding the Lord's physical appearance, please notice what Isaiah says in **verse 2**, ***"He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him."*** And really, beyond this, the Bible does not say very much about the appearance of Jesus. But we do learn here that Jesus did not look like a Savior. Jesus did not look like a Messiah. Certainly the world puts a great emphasis on the way we look, and yet we find here that there was nothing about the Lord's physical appearance that set Him apart. There was nothing about His physical appearance that made Him special. In fact, you might remember that when the Lord was betrayed by Judas, Judas had to arrange to betray Him with a kiss so that the soldiers would be able to identify the Lord. In other words, Judas couldn't just say, **"Well, go arrest the guy with the halo."** Judas could not say, **"Go arrest the guy with the glowing skin."** Judas could not say, **"Go arrest the guy with the long, flowing hair."** But instead, Judas had to kiss the Lord as a sign because the Lord's appearance was average. The Lord was down-to-earth. There was nothing to set Him apart. There were no special robes or clothing. You know, today, religious leaders will often wear special robes or sashes or hats, and so when you walk into a room today, it is easy to say, **"There's the pastor,"** or, **"There's the holy man,"** or, **"There's the 'special' guy."** But Jesus was not like that. If you were to walk into a room with the Son of God, you wouldn't know who it was! He did not dress the way we would expect royalty to dress. He hung out with tax collectors, and prostitutes, and sinners, and walking into a room, you wouldn't know which one was a tax collector and which one was the Son of God—they all looked the same! Who would have ever thought that Jesus would have looked average!

Maybe some of you saw the story several years ago where British forensic anthropologists teamed up with Israeli archaeologists to create their impression of an average Jewish man from the First Century. Forensic anthropologists are those guys who take a skull that has been found in a field, they take measurements, they start using clay, and eventually they come out with a face that people can recognize, and they end up finding out whose body they actually found. So, these people studied skulls from Israel at the time of Christ, they studied ancient drawings, they studied written accounts, all in an attempt to come up with some remote idea of what Jesus might have looked like. Apparently, the average Jewish man at the time of Christ was 5'1" tall with an average weight of 110 pounds. Think about that for just a moment! An average modern man would be looking down on the Lord. I, for example, would be one foot taller than He was, and I would weigh almost twice as much! Since Jesus was a carpenter, they figured he was more fit and a little more weathered-looking than the average man, and they came up with the conclusion that is on the wall back here. A very interesting portrait! Of course, this is quite different from most of the paintings and pictures that most of us are familiar with. Most of us are familiar with the "white" Jesus, the wimpy-looking woman of a man—the long flowing hair and perfectly combed beard (hair like we might see in a Pantene commercial). Isaiah, though, says that the Lord was average.

In reality, none of us will ever know what Jesus really looks like until we see him face-to-face. Nevertheless, the point is that the appearance of Jesus was average. How amazing—that the Son of God would leave the glory of heaven...to become average. What was God trying to communicate here? What does all of this mean? It means that God came to earth not to impress us but to be one of us—to be with us—to understand what we are going through—to remind us that the message is more important than the package.

This past week, I sat down in a seemingly vain attempt to catch up with my daily Bible reading, and something struck me. As I sat down, there were two choices. On one hand, the latest issue of one of my favorite magazines—the November issue of *Popular Mechanics*—a glossy, appealing cover—the Year’s Best Inventions, Jay Leno’s jet car (245 MPH), Plasma Rocket, DIY Wind Power, Supercopter Flying Car (for real this time), Future Gaming, Gyro Robot...and then in the other hand, a little blue book—542 pages of fine print with no pictures. Satan doesn’t play fair, does he? In **2 Corinthians 4:4**, the Bible says that, “...***the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.***” As Christians, we have been reminded from **Isaiah 53** that the message is more important than the package!

II. **As we continue looking at Isaiah 53, I would like for us to notice that THE SUFFERING SERVANT WAS ULTIMATELY REJECTED.** **»PPT»**

According to **verse 3**, “***He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.***” The Son of God was despised and rejected. Please think for a moment about the pain of rejection. What does it feel like to have our ideas shot down at work? What does it feel like to be the last one picked for a team? What does it feel like to be turned down when asking someone out on a date? The Bible tells us that Jesus felt the pain of rejection in a very personal way. Even His own followers could not even make up their minds. Even Peter, one of the Lord’s closest friends, was on again, off again. And even when the Lord would perform miracles, some would believe, but many would not—the Pharisees would take it and twist it and get upset that Jesus was breaking some kind of man-made law.

He was ridiculed and mocked, despised and rejected—someone not worth paying attention to—a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He never had a wife, never had a home, never had any children, never had any wealth, never had any of the things that make us happy. And so the question is: Did Jesus ever laugh? Did Jesus ever smile? I would have to say: I do not know. I would assume so. After all, as we have already discussed, He was an average man. But then again, the Bible never specifically tells us that He did. And in fact, here, the Lord is described as being, “...***a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.***” His life was characterized by sorrow and rejection.

And here we are, nearly 2,700 years after this prophecy was first made, and Jesus continues to be rejected. People all around us fail to see the importance of accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Here in Madison, some will politely say that Jesus was perhaps a great teacher, and that we should study what He said—just like the teachings of Ghandi, or Confucius, or Buddha, or Mohammed. And so it is just as Isaiah said at the end of **verse 3**, “...*we have esteemed him not.*” In other words, as a society, we generally do not honor Jesus as we should. Let us remember Paul’s attitude in **Philippians 3:8**, where Paul said, “...*I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.*” When we value the Lord as we should, we make Him the object of our worship—we put Him above sports, we put Him above school, we put Him above making a living, we put Him above our families, we put Him above our hobbies—we put Him first—and until that happens, the Lord will continue to be despised and rejected—a man of sorrows.

III. But before we finish our study this morning, let us also consider a third basic concept here. Not only were people SHOCKED that Jesus was the Messiah, and not only was He REJECTED, but we are about to find (leading into next week’s study) that THE LORD WENT THROUGH ALL OF THIS FOR US. **▶▶PPT▶▶**

We notice in **verse 4**, “*Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.*” We have the clear idea that Jesus is stepping in here as our substitute. We know what it means to make a substitution. In school, we have substitute teachers, where one teacher steps in for another. On the court or on the field, a coach will often make a substitution—one player is called in off the field while another steps in. Well, we find here that Jesus is our substitute. Jesus stepped in and took the punishment that we deserve. In **Romans 6:23**, we find that, “...*the wages of sin is death.*” He took the punishment that we should have taken. As we look at what Isaiah writes for us here, it goes against everything we have ever learned about what is fair and what is not fair. If you want to talk to some experts on what is fair, talk to some kids, talk to some siblings. “**She got to go to McDonald’s, and I had to stay here with you—that’s not fair!**” “**He got to stay up later than me—that’s not fair!**” In fact, what we read here in **Isaiah 53** has to be *the most unfair thing ever done*. The suffering was His, the punishment was ours, but He took it willingly.

He didn’t just take the punishment for “nice” people, but He took it for all of us. “***Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.***” In other words, even as He died on the cross, the people who saw it happen looked at His suffering as being a punishment from God. Does that sound familiar? Like the so-called “friends” in the book of **Job**, people were mocking the Lord as if He had done some terrible thing, but He took it all for us. As Peter said in **1 Peter 2:24**, “...*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.*” With that, we remember the words of

Hebrews 9:22, where we find that, *"...all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."* If you have seen the movie, **"The Passion of the Christ,"** then you might have a mental image of the amount of blood that was involved in the suffering of Jesus. Even Roger Ebert, who has seen some violent movies in his time, gave the movie a **"Thumbs Up,"** but he said that it was the most violent film that he had ever seen. Coming from Roger Ebert, that means a lot—the bloodiest movie he had ever seen.

According to **verse 5**, *"He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed."* Even with all of our careful research, and actors, and make-up, I don't know if we can ever really understand what Jesus went through. Maybe you can look back with me one chapter, to **Isaiah 52:14**. The NIV says, *"Just 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."* Another translation (NLT) says, *"Many were amazed when they saw Him—beaten and bloodied, so disfigured one would scarcely know He was a person."* Another translation (The Message) says, *"Everyone was appalled. He didn't even look human—a ruined face, disfigured past recognition."*

One ancient Roman historian told of a man who was **"whipped until his bones were bare."** Another historian tells of a martyr in Smyrna who was scourged until **"the deepest veins and arteries were exposed, and even the inner organs of the body were seen."** This is even before the cross! Why would God allow this? *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life"* (**John 3:16**).

Several years ago, National Geographic published an article about a young man from Pennsylvania who was severely burned in a boiler explosion. To save his life, doctors covered him with 6,000 square centimeters of donor skin. Later, a journalist asked him, **"Do you ever think about the donor who saved you?"** The young man replied, **"To be alive because of a dead donor is too big, too much, so I do not think about it."** We can hardly imagine being in that situation, and yet the Bible teaches that the Suffering Servant took our place and took our punishment. He did it *for us*.

Conclusion:

»PPT» This morning we have a decision to make, and our response to this passage means everything.

- Are we willing to accept Jesus as the Messiah—even though He appeared to be quite average? Or do we use His averageness as an excuse to put Him on the same pedestal right along with the leaders of all of the other world religions?
- Secondly, will we turn away from the Man of Sorrows? Will we reject the Lord when we consider what our own peers are doing, or will we have the courage to stand up?

- And finally, do we accept what Isaiah tells us here, that the Lord suffered on our behalf? And if so, then are we willing to respond to the Lord's message in faithful obedience?

Our response to the Gospel According to Isaiah means everything. This morning, the prophet Isaiah has told us about the Suffering Servant and has explained the reason for the suffering. The message of the first six verses is that ***there is no need for anyone to be lost***. But rather, there is a way to be saved—by calling on the suffering and death of Christ to cover our sins. The Father has said that He will forgive us in the name of His Son—but we must accept the offer of salvation on His terms, not ours.

The Bible teaches that we must turn away from sin, that we must be willing to publicly confess our belief in Jesus as the Son of God, and that we must then allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you are already a Christian and have been caught up in some kind of sin, and if you would like to make things right with God, we can pray about that as a congregation. We would invite you to write it down and bring it to the front in just a moment. We can pray about it together. But if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know about that decision as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org