

**"SERVANT, SACRIFICE, SAVIOR"****Isaiah 52:13-53:12****THEME: Communion/The Lord's Supper****DATE: 06/03/07**

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Shortly before the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for the sins of the world, he established a ritual with his disciples, and told them to remember him by doing it over and over again.

That instruction from our Lord has passed along to all his followers in every age.

That's why we celebrate communion. Christ ordained it. It's a holy ordinance.

- How well can you remember something you were not present to see? That's what we try to do on our national holidays.

We have the historical accounts of great events. We've heard them; we've read about them; we've seen them depicted in movies. That's how we remember them.

- Whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember a historical—and historic—event, accurately and passionately.

Jesus Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection constitute the main event in the Bible

Perhaps the most remarkable and the most compelling account of this comes from the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah. It's Isaiah 52:13 through the end of chapter 13. Listen as I read it.

That's less than 200 words in the Hebrew Bible, but it describes a startling spectacle. If you ask God to open your heart and mind to grasp this scene, you won't forget it.

- The Prophet Isaiah described this in the second half of the eighth century before Christ. He addressed the people of Judah, including Jerusalem. He called their attention to the central figure of history—the hoped-for Messiah.

Isaiah spoke "proleptically." He spoke of something that had not yet happened as though it had already occurred. Sometimes this is called the prophetic perfect tense.

- Let me tell you about Liz's and my experience last week. We were at a place called SonScape in the Colorado Rockies. It's a ministry dedicated to the spiritual, emotional, and physical renewal and refreshment of pastors and missionaries.

We are very grateful to the people who made it possible for us to attend.

We spent the time with several other couples—from Texas, Florida, and California. The great room of the lodge has huge windows with a full vista of Pike's Peak.

Liz and I felt very close to God the Creator of that majestic beauty.

- Some people say they are closest to God in situations like that. I wouldn't argue with them. But let me suggest this to you: when we celebrate Communion, we get as close to Christ as we are able.

A stanza of Fanny Crosby's song, *Near the Cross*, underscores what should happen when we take the bread and the cup that are symbols of Christ's suffering and death for us: *Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me; help me walk from day to day, with it's shadows o'er me. In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever . . .*

None of us was there, as the apostles were, to see with natural eyes the awful spectacle of Christ's suffering and death. But God's word, through the Prophet Isaiah, brings the scenes before us.

Let us picture the **scenes** Isaiah describes as we prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper, remembering Christ's death as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

**I. TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THE SERVANT (52:13-53:3)**

Let the scene develop in your mind as I read the Scripture once again.

Close your eyes, if that works for you. But open them when I've finished reading the text, okay? I've learned that a nodding congregation doesn't necessary mean you're agreeing with me.

- The Messiah on the Cross was not a pretty sight. But this is part of what the Prophet Isaiah invites people to look at.

He starts out with an emphatic invitation, *hinnéh—Behold! Look at this!*

<sup>13</sup> *See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.*

<sup>14</sup> *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--*

<sup>15</sup> *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.*

<sup>53:1</sup> *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*

<sup>2</sup> *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.*

<sup>3</sup> *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.*

The contrast here is astonishing.

In the first scene (v.13) I see people bowing in awe before his magnificence and majesty.

In the next scene (v.14) I see people nauseated at the revolting spectacle of the hideous figure—tortured, disfigured so that he barely looked like a human being.

- What mental image do you have of Jesus? You have probably been influenced by drawings or dramas or movies about the life of Jesus in which he resembles Warner Sallman's head of Jesus. It's one of the most popular works of art of all time. It has been reproduced more than 500 million times. We have a copy of it hanging on a wall in our Lobby.

Did Jesus look like Sallman's image? Probably not. Most likely Jesus had a much darker complexion.

The Bible does not describe for us what Jesus looked like, except for this description in Isaiah of a man so beaten and bloodied and disfigured that he didn't look human.

- This is the image God chose to leave with Christ's followers—not a sweet Jesus or a *gentle Jesus, meek and mild*.

Calvin Miller, a Christian writer warned against the danger of what he called the "sweet Jesus syndrome." He said, "This high-calorie addiction gets sticky and gums up ordinary worship."

This description of Jesus in Isaiah is anything but sweet. Viewers were appalled at him, he appearance was so disfigured that he didn't look human. People hid their faces (v.3) because the sight was so hideous.

But Isaiah says, "Look at him." See the exalted Lord in v.13, and then look at the hideous servant described in the verses that follow.

- Jesus Christ himself, giving the bread to his disciples, said *this is my body*. The cup of wine symbolized his blood, as he would literally die on the cross.

Then he said, *Remember. Do this in remembrance of me.*

- Don't let this scene fade from your mind. Don't replace it with some false, sentimental, sweet Jesus that is less disturbing to you.

Look at the suffering servant. He said he didn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

He came to serve and to give his life. This is what he looked like.

Take a good look at Christ the Servant.

[2<sup>nd</sup> scene Isaiah describes]

## II. TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THE SACRIFICE (53:4-10)

Listen as I read the description of Christ the Sacrifice again. Try to grasp the image in your mind.

Oh, and in this one, you have to put yourself in the picture too.

<sup>4</sup> *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.*

<sup>5</sup> *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.*

<sup>6</sup> *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.*

<sup>7</sup> *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.*

<sup>8</sup> *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.*

<sup>9</sup> *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.*

<sup>10</sup> *Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,*

Jesus Christ was the sacrifice for your sin. He took the punishment in your place.

The Apostle John wrote, "*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*" (1 John 2:2)

- But people thought God was punishing Jesus by for his own sins.

This is the scene that I picture. It's on the street in Jerusalem later called the *Via Dolorosa* (lit. "sorrowful way"). I see the crowds of Passover pilgrims having to make way as a pathetic, bloodied figure, prodded by Roman soldiers, struggles under the crossbeam of his own cross. He has been condemned to the most excruciating means of execution. Let me remind you that the word "excruciating" is derived from the word "cross." Jesus has already been beaten beyond recognition. I hear some say as they recoil from the sight, "Oh! That miserable creature! He must have been terribly wicked for God to allow such harsh punishment. Well, I suppose we're better off without the likes of him around here anymore! He probably deserves it."

Jesus didn't deserve it. We deserved it! '*He was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace (with God) was upon him.*' (53:5)

The Apostle Peter wrote, "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*" (1 Peter 2:24)

- Was it a tragedy? Was it a miscarriage of justice? No!

It was the perfect vindication of divine justice. God's righteousness demands that sin be punished. God the Son took that punishment for us.

And yet those who knew Jesus—those who had heard his compelling teaching and seen his amazing miracles—must have wondered what went wrong.

But this was the greatest "right" that ever occurred on earth since creation. God was making right the massive damage caused by mankind's wrong.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross marks the end of evil's tyrannical rule over the souls of people.

For family devotions Martin Luther once read the biblical account in Genesis 22 of Abraham offering Isaac on the altar. Luther's wife Katie said, "I do not believe it. God would not have treated his son like that!" Luther answered, "But, Katie, he did." He did.

- That's the second scene. Take a good look at Christ the Sacrifice. It's not what it appears to be.

He was not executed for his own wrongdoing. He had done no wrong, only the greatest right ever!

[3<sup>rd</sup> scene Isaiah describes]

### III. TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THE SAVIOR (53:10-12)

This is the culmination of God's plan of salvation for sinful people.

<sup>10</sup> *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.*

<sup>11</sup> *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.*

<sup>12</sup> *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.*

It is only because of Jesus' death that sinful people can be justified—declared righteous by God (v.11)

The Apostle Paul explained this to Roman Christians, "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, . . .*" (Romans 8:1)

Every person who sincerely repents of sin and believes in Jesus Christ as Savior is cleansed of sins and has peace with God.

- The last verse in our text is very similar to the first verse (52:13).

Because Christ poured out his life unto death and was counted with the transgressors, and bore their sins and made intercession before God for them, therefore Jesus Christ has "a portion among the great."

This strikingly similar to what Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians: "*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" (Philippians 2:9-11)

None of our imaginations can capture such a scene, but John's revelation helps: "*Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled*

*the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"*  
(Revelation 5:11-13)

God's Word, the Bible, helps us to take a good look at Christ the Savior—Christ our Savior.

We remember better what we have seen clearly.

I hope you have seen Jesus Christ more clearly than ever before, because in a few moments we are going to take Communion—the Lord's Supper.

Jesus instructed his followers to do it in remembrance of him.

To do this right, I believe we should see Jesus:

- As the Servant who, in carrying out his mission, was tortured with such cruelty that he didn't look like a human being. And it was for you.
- As the Sacrifice that God required, not for his sins (he had none) but for our sins. It was all God's doing—for you.
- As the Savior who rescues from the power of sin and guilt all who believe. He came to save you.

Have you humbled yourself before Jesus Christ, the Servant, the Sacrifice, the Savior? Do you have peace with God—no guilt, no fear—because you know that Jesus Christ has cleansed you from all your sin and made you righteous before God?

If that describes you, please share with us in the Lord's Supper in a few moments. This is for you, even if this is not your home church.

If that doesn't describe you I ask you very respectfully just to let the bread and the cup pass by you.

But I hope that won't be necessary. In these next few minutes you have the opportunity silently where you are to make peace with God by sincerely confessing your sin and asking Christ to forgive you and putting your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Parents, if you have children with you, I'm sure you understand that this is not a casual matter. If you know that your children have received Jesus as their Savior by personal faith, it's appropriate for them to share in this with us.