

III Advent Christmas “Jesus, the Servant” Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

Please turn in your scriptures to Isaiah 52:13- 53:12. We're going to read through fifty three, verse twelve. We're continuing on in this series of Advent where we are really asking, who is this? The song that that Hannah just sang, who is this that we are waiting to come? All that advent means is arrival. And so we're really asking, who are we waiting for? Who is the one who is arriving? And as we've been seeing over the course of this series, we've been seeing that there's a variety of ways that we can describe the one who is to come. He can be described as a serpent crushing seed of the woman. He could be described as the son, the covenantally faithful partner, who lives the life we should have lived and wins the award on our behalf. And now, as we'll see today, he is also that one who is coming. He is a servant and he's coming to take our place.

Now, I just want to be clear about something too. This is not because God is complicated and he has complicated needs for us. God is quite simple. The problem isn't in God. The problem is in us that ever since the fall, there's all these different ways that we need to be disentangled from the sin that we participated in willfully, thereby breaking the relationship that we had with God. And so as we are, we're coming to the person who is to come. As we are awaiting his arrival, we recognize he's doing many different things in many ways. That's what we do here in church. We are rehearsing all the ways in which Christ Jesus is saving us and is saving his elect. That's what we do.

So turn your eyes now to Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you, probably referring to Israel, they're his audience, as many were astonished at you. His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. So shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him. For that which has not been told them they see, and that which has not, which they have not heard, they understand. But who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. And like sheep that before its shearers is silent. So he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offering. He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied, and by his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many. And he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.

This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Well, we have to realize where we are here in Isaiah, the prophet's ministry. Uh, we're pretty late at this point. He's been talking a lot about the coming threat of exile and the restoration that will come afterwards. And

when he talks about the restoration, he's often drawing our attention to the grand character of the Lord's restoration of his people and the people who will be involved in that restoration. And he talks about a sign, child. Right. Emmanuel? The one who is born of the Virgin, who will be a sign child, that that the deliverance has come. And then later he talks about a child who will be born and will sort of establish or reinstall, uh, the Davidic government on the shoulders of the child will be the government. He'll be mighty Counselor, the Almighty father, Prince of Peace. He'll have all these royal titles placed on him, and he'll be a victorious king. But it's late here in Isaiah's prophecy, where he introduces this third character and it's the character of the servant. Now, there's actually four songs altogether. What we've just read is the fourth of four suffering servant songs. If you want to go back and see what you can find them elsewhere in Scripture, you can look at them in Isaiah 42:1-9, that's Psalm one. Psalm two is 49:1-7 and then Psalm three is 50:4-11. . And then Psalm four is what we just read.

Everyone generally agrees that these songs are meant to be read together. They're kind of a story. They're a little biography of this character who is the servant. And yet what we notice right away is that this character is not like the other characters. And again, it gets at the different themes, the different ways in which Jesus is saving us. He's not like a king who comes out and establishes his empire, but rather he performs more like a priest, interceding, standing in, being a substitute. In fact, we could even say he's acting kind of like how Israel was supposed to act. As a matter of fact, in one of the songs in the second song in Isaiah forty, the servant is actually addressed as Israel. It says, O Israel the servant. But it's not Israel of history, because Israel doesn't do these things. Rather, it's kind of an ideal Israel. It's what Israel should have done as a kingdom of priests. It is reconciling the world to Adonai, to the Lord. But they didn't and so he's singing a song about the kind of servant, the sort of ideal Israelite. And in doing so, he answers a question about the Old Testament, a question about what needs to happen for us to be saved that we might have missed.

Okay, we all recognize in Christmas, right? That that Jesus is the answer. Right. Jesus is the answer. And yet, in many ways, we have to still ask what is the question? Right? What is Jesus the answer to? And that's really what the Old Testament is doing. The Old Testament is giving us the question that Jesus answers. And here's a particular question that only the servant to come can answer. And the question is this how is it that God can be both just and merciful? How is it that God can say, I'm just, I love justice, I'll punish even to the third and the fourth generation? But I love mercy and I love acquitting the repentant. I love, I love showing mercy and forgiving. And it raises this question how can those two things be? How can God be just and then also show mercy? Or when he's showing mercy, what about his justice? His justice is a good thing. We don't find that answer until we see these songs about the servant who is to come.

There really is a biography here over the course of these four songs, and there's a biography here in this last song. We're coming to the end of the story of the servant, and we've already seen that he is sent by the Lord. He's called to judge the nations to bring light. That means revelation or the Word of God to them. He's called to set them to right. And initially he's received well. But what we see in some of the songs earlier on is that there is this kind of opposition to him, but it hasn't really bubbled up to what we see here in this last song. So as we get to this last song, we really see that the opposition to the servant has reached. Now, this fever pitch, it's become fatal. He's in danger of losing his life.

So let's look at chapter fifty two and fifty three, and let's break up the song into five major sections. There's five movements of this song, and the first one is the servants exaltation. The second one is the servants humiliation, the third one is the servants representation, the fourth is the servants defamation, and then finally the servants justification. So let's follow the song through so that we can discern who is it?

Who is this servant that is to come? Well, we start with the exaltation in verses thirteen through fifteen of chapter fifty two. It's important to realize this, that the servant is a person of great character. Okay, notice what he says. **Behold my servant, look! Behold him. My servant acts wisely. He shall be high and lifted up.** **He shall be exalted.** You see, the servant is not coming from a lowly position. The servant is not someone who is low in character or who is a fool who doesn't deserve any celebration. Rather, the servant ought to be celebrated, not to be recognized. That the servant has a kind of character, a kind of gift in terms of obedience to the law and an understanding of biblical wisdom, so that when people are around him, they recognize that there's something different about him. Notice, it says they were astonished by him because outwardly he doesn't seem grand, but inwardly he's grand. Outwardly, outwardly he doesn't seem to be glorious. But if you get to know him, you find that he is glorious. As a matter of fact, he even says he was marred in his

semblance. And this is projecting the fact that there's going to be a kind of persecution that comes to the servant. He's marred in his visage. As you look at him, he's marred in his appearance. And yet. The mouths of kings are shut before him like the lion's shut before Daniel. When they saw him, there was nothing much that esteemed him to them. And yet when they got to know him, it says their mouths were shut before him. As a matter of fact, he says they understood what they could not hear. They finally had insight of the things they could not see. And if you think about it, what is Isaiah doing there? He's remembering back to his calling in Isaiah six. You remember in the year that King Uzziah died, I was in the temple, and the glory of the Lord filled it. Remember the seraphim? And they put the coal on his lips. And you remember, he says, what shall I say? What is my calling? And the Lord says to him, preach! But they won't hear. Having ears, They won't hear. Having eyes they won't see. Preach until they go into their judgment. Notice what's going to happen when the servant comes. They didn't hear, but when they see him, they'll finally understand. They didn't see right. But when they perceived him, the servant, they'll finally understand. You see, the servant is worthy of celebration and exaltation. But it's not because he's good looking. It's not because he's strong. It's not because he. You know, his jaw cuts a nice square. And as we see him, we go, oh, wow, that guy's really impressive. It's as you get to know him, you'll see. Oh, I have nothing to say before this person. And that draws us, of course, to the next section. His humiliation, while his inward character is one of exaltation. What we see here is that his outward appearance is quite the opposite. He's just like everybody else. There's nothing about him that makes him stand out. Look at verse two of chapter fifty three. He had no form or majesty that we should even look at him. No beauty that we should desire him. You know, if this was another religion, we might imagine people to say his face was the grandest of all faces when he walked in. You know, you could just tell there was something different about him because the way he was built. But notice, Jesus isn't that way. The servant is not that way. He's not eye catching. He's normal, perhaps even forgettable.

I remember years ago, decades ago, one of those weekly magazines, and I can't remember if it was Time or Newsweek, but it was one of those two. I'm pretty sure they had this cover story, and it was around the time of Christmas, as they were wont to do. Some of you don't even remember paper magazines that came out every week. Okay, but this was a thing back in the old days. Okay. And it came out. It had this picture of this face on the front of it and said, what did Jesus really look like? And they had done a bunch of sociological study and biological study, and they tried to discern what he could look like. And of course, this is a totally foolish endeavor. You can't find out the facial features of any particular person who lived two thousand years ago. But what did they show? And this is where it actually did have some value that stuck with me. Okay, what did they show us? They did show us just a regular looking person, right? He was just the face that they came up with just looked like everybody else. As a matter of fact, you could imagine this person selling trinkets on the via de la Rosa today in Jerusalem. Some of you'd walk by and you wouldn't even. You wouldn't even notice that you had seen them. If someone said pick him out of a lineup, you wouldn't be able to find him because he was so plain looking. There was nothing to esteem him to us. And that thing they got right.

You see, if you saw Jesus, your spirit may burn within you. You may walk away saying, wait, what just happened? But it's not because of how he looked. It's not because of his physical appearance. You see, this is important because notice what the prophet says. He says people are astonished as they were at you. And remember I said, I think he's talking about his audience there, because remember what it says about Israel. The Lord doesn't choose Israel. This is Deuteronomy seven seven. The Lord did not choose you because you were the greatest, most beautiful of nations, but because you were the least. Remember how he chooses David. It's not because you're the tallest of the people out there. Saul's tall. Saul's handsome. Saul looks like a king. But David, who was young, his father didn't even think to call him in to meet the prophet. He said, no, he's not. He's not suitable.

You see how the Lord loves to show his strength through our human weakness. That that's even true in Jesus. There's nothing to esteem him to us. He was humble. He would have looked just like any other Levantine person living in those days. Surely wasn't blond haired and blue eyed, did not look like a model or a king. As a matter of fact, he might have been quite forgettable. And that leads us now to the next part, verses four through six. Even though he deserves to be exalted, he is living a humble life like any of us. Why? Because he represents each one of us. That's what's important here. Okay, notice he is a representative. And I don't mean that he's a metaphorical representative of people, but rather he is a substitute. He is a stand in for us. You can't see this idea of substitutionary atonement any clearer in the New Testament than you see it. Right here, right here in the old. That the humiliation that comes as a result of the definition, defamation that

we haven't gotten to yet, is so apart. It's such a falsification of his exaltation, right, that he becomes a substitute for us atoning for our sins. Look at what the prophet says here. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed. You see, as we learn about the servant, we learn that love, the love of the servant, is a sacrificial love. And of course, as we continue to read through Scripture, as we just did when we read Ephesians five, we learned that actually all true love is sacrificial love. It's a self-giving love. It's something that we miss sometimes in our culture, love is not how I feel. Love is my giving up of myself for the other. Why? Because our Savior gave up of himself for us. He stood in receiving what we deserve, that we might receive, what he earned, what he inherited. See, this is the love of God, that he did not become a human merely so that he can relate to us. He did not become a human merely so he could relate to us. I know that's a wonderful thing, and it is the fact that our High priest can relate to every single one of our experiences is a beautiful, beautiful thing. And yet we must recognize that he did not become human just so he could relate to us, but rather so that he could truly stand in for us and become a substitution for us. Notice that in this passage too if we read closely, we note that we find the doctrine of total depravity hidden away here in our Old Testament. What does it say? Does it say that some of us, like sheep, have gone astray? Does it say. Does it say just a few of us, or the worst of us have gone after their own ways and directions? No. All of us have gone astray. We have turned every one, lest you miss it. We have turned every single one of us his own way. But the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. You see total depravity there. There's nothing we could have done to save ourselves. We've all gone after our own way. Only the servant. Only the servant is faithful to the way of the Lord. So he deserves to be exalted. But he's humiliated in his humiliation. We see that he becomes a representative of us both in our plainness.

But now, as we'll see next in the guilt that we deserve, he will represent us in receiving the justice that we ourselves deserve. That brings us to the Reformation, verses seven through nine. You see, in verses seven through nine, we see that the humiliation is in all. It's not just that he's passively like us. He looks kind of like us. He acts like a regular human. It's not just that, but actually the humiliation is increased into defamation. He is not just seen as being plain, he is seen as being evil. He is accused of crimes. He is called an offender. Now, this is crucial for the doctrine of substitutionary atonement that Christ is treated like a criminal even though he is innocent. It's important that this willful dereliction of justice takes place in the life of the servant, because he is being accused of sins, though they are not sins that he is committed. I mean, why is this important? Let's imagine it a different way. Let's imagine that Jesus, the incarnation, happens. He lives a life that we live. And yet somewhere along the way, while he's feeding the hungry, or he's helping the poor, he's casting out demons on his way back to the house. Okay, there's some construction going by and someone drops a plank and he's killed. It's just an accident, right? Okay. Do you understand how in that way, he would not be being a substitutionary atonement for us? But the Lord wants to put this in a very clear relief. He wants to make it very clear. When Jesus goes to the cross. It's not a mistake. It's not. It's not a miss. He's not misidentified. And they've arrested the wrong man. They are accusing him of crimes. The one who knew no crime. They are putting him between two common criminals so that he might be taking the place of a common criminal. You see what's going on here? As we see Christ's defamation take place, we recognize that he is being accused, but he's not. It's not just that he's innocent and being accused of a crime. He's being accused of the crimes that we have committed. You see that it's important here. It's important that it happens the way it happens. We see it all the way back here in Isaiah fifty three, where it says he is defamed so that he might become sin. The one who knew no sin. Reminds me of the hymn by Stuart Townsend, how deep the father's love for us. And it has these haunting words in it. Behold the man upon the cross, My sin upon his shoulders. Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers. Can you imagine you're going back in time and being there, being that in that terrible place. And you walk up and you see him, you see the Lord on the cross, and you hear the people crying out. And then as you're face scans the crowd, you see yourself there. You realize this, this is fundamentally what's taking place. It is our sins that fix him there. And yet being fixed there by our sin means that his that the justice that we deserve is being placed on him so that we might receive the reward and the inheritance that he Himself has earned. Notice this. Notice that he doesn't open his mouth. You see how the prophet spends time focusing on this idea that that he doesn't open his mouth, that he stays silent. He was oppressed. He was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. And like a sheep that before its shearers is silent. So he opened not his mouth. Why this? Why focus on this aspect of Christ going, being unjustly accused, taking his place upon the cross? And yet he opened not his mouth. He doesn't cry out and say, you've got the wrong guy. John, tell him I didn't do those things. He doesn't cry out and say those things. He doesn't say, well, these are common criminals.

I'm not guilty of anything. But he goes silently. I think that picture of the silence is to draw our attention to the fact that the servant is giving himself. He's not being taken against his will. It's important for us to realize his death is not an accident. His death is also not something that is taken from him or forced upon him, but rather he goes and at every point along the way he is allowing the events to take place, even his own death. He says, father, into your hands I commit my spirit. He, even his own death is under his control. We shouldn't forget that this is indeed the creator of the universe, second person of the Trinity, who with a word could change the intention of those Roman soldiers so that they turn around with their spears and their swords, and they race into Pontius Pilate's house and have a coup, and take over Jerusalem for the sake of the kingdom of Jesus. He could have done that. He could have snapped his fingers right, and the whole crowd would be eviscerated. He could have.

Let's be honest with ourselves here. He's the creator of the universe who spoke into to existence out of his own wise counsel. Even the idea of atoms and elements in or that is now being used as nails to nail him to the cross. He could have in this kind of wonderful act of divine alchemy, he could have rewoven the fibers of the wood or of those nails into a golden throne, so that as they go to put him on the cross, he sits down on the greatest throne ever seen in all of humanity. He could have done all those things. But he goes silently in control, showing true strength and true love.

And of course, that brings us now to the servants justification, verses ten through twelve. The final stage of his story is the reason why this one, who ought to be exalted, is humiliated who as a representation has now become defamed. Why? It's also that we might find our justification in him. Look at what it says in verses eleven and twelve of chapter fifty three, out of the anguish of his soul. We shall see and be satisfied by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted as righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong. You see, this is what the gospel message teaches us. And yes, you're right when you see this idea of accounting as righteous, that's the exact same language that we find back in Genesis fifteen, where it tells where we're told that Abraham believed and his belief his faith was accredited to him, was accounted to him as righteousness. Yes. It's the same thing that Paul is saying in Romans four when he's referring back to Abraham, to say how we are saved. We're all saved the same way from Abraham to us. Your faith is accounted as righteousness. How we finally see how? Because we have the servant, he took upon himself the guilt of our sin. He gave us his righteousness. It's a sad thing that there are many in the world today, even many Christians who don't understand this idea of substitutionary atonement. The fact that Jesus is bearing upon himself the judgment that we deserve. You know, some people are some Christians don't recognize that that's a doctrine of our salvation. But do you realize that means they now have to ignore all of those passages in the Old Testament where it talks about God being just? Or we have to ignore all of those passages where it talks about us receiving Christ's righteousness. You see, when we give up substitutionary atonement, we give up the richness of our justification. You know that, don't you? When you become a Christian, it's not just that your account is paid out and now you have like an empty account, but just no more debt. That's not what's going on. We're not going back to the Garden of Eden in our salvation. We're yearning for the new heavens and new earth. We're receiving not just a paid off account. We're receiving the glories of Christ's righteousness. Our justification is a beautiful thing. We are accounted as righteous because of what Christ has done. And the fact that some people miss that as a sad thing for the church. It's why you might find me emphasizing this over and over again. It's important that we remember the truth and the reality of substitutionary atonement to our Christian doctrine of salvation, because it means now, now you are participants and the everlasting gift of Christ's inheritance. I like how C.S. Lewis talks about the fact that we are all like the servant much more than we seem on the outside. He actually says this. This is both for Christians and non-Christians. He says this -- there are no ordinary people. This is in his book, The Weight of Glory. It's a wonderful book, wonderful quote. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations these are mortal and their life is like the life of a gnat to us. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit immortal horrors and everlasting splendors.

You see, the world really is divided up between two kinds of people immortal horrors and everlasting splendors. And whether you're in one camp or another is decided completely and entirely on your relationship to the servant. If you are in him, then you get to enjoy the everlasting splendors of his glory. But if you are not, and as the servant reminds us here, as the prophet reminds us here, all of us are headed toward that eternal darkness, lest the servant come and do what he does. So ultimately, the story of the servant is the story of the

church who is in him. We are exalted. Like him. We get to receive the glory, the gift of the wisdom of God that is Christ crucified. We get to actually say, there's a spiritual man within us who testifies to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and awaits that eternal life in his kingdom. It's a wonderful thing. And yet also like Christ, like his people, there is nothing to really esteem us. We're not here for outward power. We're not out here for outward good looks or outward strength or outward success. That's not why we're here. We're here because of the son, the servant who dwells within us. As Paul reminds us in Corinthians, there's not many wise, there's not many noble, not many rich. As Jesus says, I didn't come for the healthy, I came for the sick. Do you realize that? Don't be surprised when you look around yourself at the church and you say, there's not much to esteem us to the world. That's the same way that the servant was. And because we are represented in him, we find that we too are often defamed like him. As a matter of fact, he warns us of this. He warns us that that the spirit of the servant will make it so that the world actually despises you.

You remember Jesus takes quite a bit of time explaining this to the apostles when he says in John chapter fifteen eighteen through nineteen and throughout the Gospels. If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, and the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world because I chose you, notice that I chose you out of the world. Therefore the world hates you. I've seen this over church history, two thousand years of church history, from the persecution that we see of the early church described in the book of acts, to the persecution under the Roman Empire over the next few centuries, where Christians were accused of being cannibals because they had this service where they would eat of the flesh of their god. Right. This is how the Romans understood it. Or later in the medieval period, when people who were just trying to read the scripture and have faithful worship of God through faith, were being persecuted and thrown in jail, or in modern day China, where the idea that you believe in a king and that his kingdom will come one day in the future, makes you an enemy of the state, that there are places in the world where if you believe in Jesus Christ, your family will disavow you because they believe that you have rejected their true religion.

I've seen it in our own time, just over the course of my life. I remember growing up in a Christian family and being one identified with the church, and that early on this is in the eighties and 90s. If you go back and watch our movies, our cultural artifacts from those days, how are Christians depicted? They're always kind of prudish and boring. They're goody two shoes. They don't know how to have a good time. And if you notice how that's changed, that that now in recent decades now, Christians are depicted as hateful and evil and that they're actually destabilizing to society. Do you notice it's never positive. The alibi might change. The reason why they hate you may change, but as Jesus tells us, they're going to hate you ultimately because they hated me. You're being in the spirit. You're being in the servant. When they reject you. And that's why it's so important that we remember the servant story as we look at the Christmas story, because the servant story is being played out in these very early chapters of Christ's life, a baby, second person of the Trinity, as a baby in a manger, a farm stable that's not even suitable for human occupation. And yes, he does receive tributes from wise men who represent kings in the East, and yet notice he receives them in secret, because the king in his land is looking to kill him. And yes, there's an angelic choir that seems suitable for his exaltation. And yet it's before an audience of local shepherds. You see, even in his birth, there is little to esteem him to us. And yet, right there, already, from that time in the manger, this child's face is directed towards Jerusalem, where he will one day ascend not to a throne, but to a cross made of the wood that he himself created. You see, the story of the servant is the story of our Christ. It is the story of the church, and it's one of the hopes that we can take in this life. There are a lot of reasons and causes for suffering. It can be spiritual warfare. It can be just the results of our own sin. It can just be the result of living in a broken world. And yet we learn this from the servant's song that in the midst of the suffering, whatever the cause, the Lord is drawing us to him that we might find our Savior. We're being formed in him. We're being made cruciform in him through suffering. The one who deserved exaltation but got humiliation, the one who was our representation, though, received defamation, is the ultimate cause of our justification. It's in him that we find our salvation. And that's the story of Christmas.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, we do come before you, and we pray that you would, Lord, draw our eyes to you, servant Jesus Christ. Dear Lord, I pray that we would find our hearts conformed to your spirit, that we would find our eyes looking towards you, that we would see you and only you, dear Lord, that we would find our hearts

comforted and our spirits comforted in this gospel message, that we too have been counted as sons of God.
Lord, have mercy upon us and draw us to you. We pray in Christ's name.

Amen.