

**Week 30 – A Prophet Sees the King**  
**Isaiah 52-53: The Suffering Servant’s Song**  
**July 27-28**

**Summary & Goal:**

To behold something is to stop in awe and admire its beauty. 650 years before Jesus’ life, Isaiah saw a glimpse of the Messiah and His death. It was breathtaking and filled with awe and beauty. This portion of Scripture moves us to behold, to treasure, and savor all that Jesus would do for us on the cross. We will see that even 650 years before the cross, God was committed to suffering for our salvation.

**Main Passages:** Isaiah 52:1; 53:1-12

**Session Outline:**

- 1. The Scorned Servant**
- 2. The Substitutional Servant**
- 3. The Silent Servant**
- 4. The Sovereign Servant**

**Session in a Sentence:**

In Isaiah 52 and 53 we see God’s plan to save us from our sin, in the suffering of His Servant, Jesus.

**Kingdom Connection:**

The incredible paradox of the Kingdom of God is that its Sovereign King is a Suffering Servant. Jesus, who reigns in heaven served us on Earth by laying down His life. God’s Kingdom is inaugurated on the Cross. All those who enter the Kingdom of God must enter by the way of the cross.

**Missional Application:**

Jesus is our leader, He laid down His life for us on the cross; that means as we seek to follow Him we must daily go to the cross and lay our lives down for the furtherance of His kingdom and for the salvation of others.

## **Introduction:**

Behold- To behold is not to merely look, observe, or view something. The word “behold” in Scripture can be translated as “WOW!”. In a world where photoshopped images flicker through our feeds; few things make us step back and say WOW. It’s almost as if we have been around so much beauty that we have become desensitized to it. We are so busy viewing other people’s filtered past memories that we miss out on the present. But there are moments in life when you see them completely take your breath away. The first time you see the Rocky Mountains jetting up out of the horizon. Wow. Seeing the grandeur of the Milky Way against the velvet black sky. Wow. Certain things are so beautiful and unforgettable that they burn into your mind's eye forever. The most beautiful thing I have ever seen was on a July afternoon when two church doors swung open and my Bride in her white dress walked down the aisle toward me on our wedding day. Wow! In these moments we are not merely looking, observing or viewing. We are beholding! We are in awe of the beauty before us. God uses the word “behold” throughout Scripture as a divine highlighter to draw our attention to the beautiful things that are before us.

Sometimes, however, the “wow” portion of beholding is not because of beauty and grandeur, but a shocking reality of something that captures our attention where we can’t look away. Many people remember that kind of wow and awe on 9/11 when the twin towers were crumbling. That which was beautiful and awe-inspiring was now broken, vulnerable, shaken, and torn down. New Yorkers and people around the globe were “beholding” in such a way that disbelief could not be denied, the world had just changed.

That’s exactly how God introduces the passage in front of us today in Isaiah 52-53. If there was ever a portion of Scripture that would cause you to stop in awe, and to behold the magnificence of God it would be this passage.

Isaiah 52-53 is the last and most memorable of the 4 “Servant Songs” that were written in the book of Isaiah. Like any good song, it is ahead of its time. Isaiah is looking 650 years down the road to the person and work of Jesus Christ. When we look at the fulfillment of this messianic prophecy it is clear that no human could have predicted them by accident and the minute details that are revealed to us are not circumstantial. God used Isaiah to prophesy about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus with crystal clear preciseness.

Jews who reject Jesus refuse to even read Isaiah 53 in their synagogues. This portion of Scripture has been called “The Torture Chamber of the Rabbis” because it is puzzling to them that the life and death of Jesus were written with clarity in the pages of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we have thirty clear citations of this Servant Song and over 80 different allusions to it. Some commentators call Isaiah 52-53 the Fifth Gospel because it so accurately depicts the events that occurred in Jesus’ life. Martin Luther said this passage is so potent and ripe with spiritual life that “every Christian ought to be able to repeat it by heart.” Today we will “Behold” the most beautiful yet heart-wrenching song written in Scripture as it details Jesus as the Servant.

### **1. The Scorned Servant**

*Isaiah 52: 13 a Behold, My Servant... (Isaiah 52:13a; Chronological Bible, July 26, p.935)*

The Hebrew word for Servant is the word EBED. In its truest form it means slave. Isaiah was intentionally saying that the Messiah would be a slave to God's will. When we typically think of slaves, we have a very negative connotation, but this term "slave" (EBED) was used in the Old Testament for prophets and kings who placed themselves under God's leadership. Even Moses himself is referred to as a slave by God (Num. 12:7-8). The Old Testament scholar Walt Kaiser informs us that the word carries a connotation "not of ownership but subordination. Jesus doesn't act independently. He *only* operates under the Father's will." The events that Isaiah prophesies about were not carried out begrudgingly by Jesus. He fully knew the pain, loneliness, despair, and shame that would take place on the cross, but He went anyways because He placed Himself under the will and care of the Father as His Servant.

*Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? <sup>2</sup> For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. <sup>3</sup> He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53:1-3; Chronological Bible, July 26, pp.935-936)*

Isaiah tells us that God would "reveal" Himself through His Servant. He specifically tells us that "the arm of the Lord" would be revealed. God would roll up His sleeves to save humanity through the average arm of a carpenter. All of this would take place in a spiritually barren and dry climate. Warren Wiersbe said, "Israel was not a paradise when Jesus was born it was politically and spiritually a wilderness of dry ground."<sup>1</sup> Jesus would shoot forth like a young plant in a spiritual desert. Jesus would enter time in the midst of religiosity, dead works, and legalism and display genuine life and a vibrant relationship with God. In Mark's Gospel time after time, we see that all those who witnessed Jesus' ministry were amazed at His spiritual authority. While the Pharisees stacked law upon law on the shoulders of the people of Israel; Jesus was validated by the voice of the Father at His baptism, in healing people, casting out demons, resisting the temptations of Satan, forgiving sins, and controlling the weather (all detailed within the first four chapters of Mark's Gospel). God was revealing Himself in the person of Jesus. He was presenting the authority and power of Jesus amid dead barren religion.

But the text grows incredibly dark. It tells us that the Servant would be "despised and rejected." Even though Jesus would reveal God's heart and saving purposes, people would reject and hate Him. One Sabbath day, Jesus heals a man's withered hand. The Bible tells us that "*The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Him, how to destroy Him.*" (Mark 3:6) Since Jesus' ministry began people were amazed at His authority but also filled with disdain toward Him. The people scorned the Servant of God.

Toward the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, as He began to approach the cross the Bible tells us in Luke chapter 18, <sup>31</sup> *And taking the twelve, He said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. <sup>32</sup> For He will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. <sup>33</sup> And after flogging Him, they will kill Him, and on the third day He will rise."* (Luke 18:31-33). And then it came to fruition, "*And they spat on Him and took the reed and struck Him on the head. (Matt. 27:30).*

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<sup>1</sup> The Wiersbe Study Bible, Red Letter Edition – pg. 1055

Isaiah projects that the Messiah will be hated, rejected, and scorned by the people. The New Testament affirms that Isaiah was right. Behold, stand in awe, that Jesus was rejected by men so that men could be accepted by God.

## 2. The Substitutional Servant

*Isaiah 53:4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted* <sup>5</sup> *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 stripes we are healed.* <sup>6</sup> *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. (Isaiah 53:4-6; Chronological Bible, July 26, p.936)*

Isaiah next writes about the death of the Servant. With pinpoint accuracy, Isaiah begins to unveil what Jesus would accomplish on the cross. It is of utmost importance that we understand that all of Jesus' life was aimed toward the cross. He was born to die. P.T. Forsyth in his book *The Cruciality of the Cross* writes, "Christ is to us just what His cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what He did there... You do not understand Christ till you understand His cross."<sup>2</sup> Why would this Servant be pierced, crushed, and chastised? His motivation was simple: *for us*. He was pierced for *our* transgression. He was crushed for *our* iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought *us* peace. He went to the cross for us. Wounded to bring healing. Crushed to bring life.

In the New Testament we see the Apostle Peter repeating the prophecy of Isaiah and proclaiming that it has come true in Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2, <sup>24</sup> *He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.* <sup>25</sup> *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* (1 Peter 2:24-25) Jesus' death was substitutionary. He stood in our place. He died for our sins.

We must ask ourselves the question: how could God express His holiness in judgment and His love in pardon? We "Behold" the cross and marvel at it because it was on that cross that Jesus stood in our place as a substitute. He was pierced for us. He suffered for us. John Stott, in his classic work *The Cross of Christ* wrote, "Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us we have to see it as something done by us." It was our sin that motivated Jesus to go to the cross. It was for our guilt that the innocent suffered. It was for our shame that Jesus was hung naked on the cross. Our hands were dirty, but yet He took the nails. John Stott wrote, "At the cross in holy love God through Christ paid the full penalty of our disobedience Himself. He bore the judgment we deserved in order to bring us the forgiveness we do not deserve. On the cross divine mercy and justice were equally expressed and eternally reconciled."<sup>3</sup>

We behold Jesus on the cross, dying in our place as our substitute and say, WOW!

## 3. The Silent Servant

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<sup>2</sup> *The Cruciality of The Cross* by P.T. Forsyth, p. 44-45. Published by Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1909.

<sup>3</sup> *The Cross of Christ* (Loc 1706)

*Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed, and 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. (Isaiah 53:7; Chronological Bible, July 26, pg. 936)*

When I was in middle school I often found myself in trouble. I frequented the Principal's office and In-School Suspension (yes, I am a troublemaker turned pastor). One day during lunch we had a giant food fight in the cafeteria. Honestly, I didn't throw anything. I just stood in disbelief that this was happening. I stood amazed as chili-cheese rolls and pizza flew. About 20 seconds into the food fight I hear my name called out loud by the Assistant Principal followed by the words "Stop it right now!" I remember going to the office being accused of a crime that I didn't commit and being outraged. I didn't throw a thing. If you would have given me about 10 more seconds I might have, but somehow I got punished with three days of suspension from school and a bunch of community service hours. I remember being so upset that I was accused of a crime I didn't commit. I remember telling everybody I was innocent! I wanted justice! There was plenty of stuff I was guilty of in middle school, accuse me of that, but don't accuse me of something that never happened.

While my experience with false accusations seems trivial in comparison to Jesus, Isaiah explains that though the Messiah would be falsely accused, afflicted and punished for crimes He did not commit, "He opened not His mouth." The New Testament confirms that as Jesus was on trial He remained silent before His accusers in Matthew chapter 27, <sup>12</sup> *But when He was accused by the chief priests and elders, He gave no answer.* <sup>13</sup> *Then Pilate said to Him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?"* <sup>14</sup> *But He gave Him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. (Matt. 27:12-14)* No one ever deserved suffering less than Jesus, yet He bore the great suffering we deserve. The stamp that God put on Jesus' life according to Hebrews 4:15 is one "without sin." Jesus was the only person throughout history that didn't deserve to suffer yet suffered the most. If anybody deserved to object to the injustice it was Jesus, yet He stood silent and submissive to the will of the Father.

#### **4. The Sovereign Servant**

*Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. (Isaiah 53:10; Chronological Bible July 26, p.936)*

The word "crushed" in the Hebrew (DAKA), means to literally crush into a fine dust. In extrabiblical Hebrew literature, the word was used to describe mortar being broken down into a fine powder, to literally beat to pieces. Jesus Christ was pulverized by the cross. It was a hideous death. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* tells us:

"The wounds swelled about the rough nails and the torn and lacerated tendons and nerves caused excruciating agony. The arteries of the head and the stomach were surcharged with blood and a terrific throbbing headache ensued... the victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths... the suffering was so frightful that even amongst the raging passions of war pity was sometimes excited." <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/C/cross.html>

The physical torment of the cross was a pulverizing “crushing” of the Son of God. The weight of the shame, distress, and pain was unbearable. When we think about the pain of the cross, one word comes to mind, “excruciating”. In fact, the word, excruciating, comes from the Latin word, *excruciare*, to crucify. The word means, “a pain like the pain of the crucifixion”. The very metric by which we measure adverse pain comes from the cross.

We must remember that “it was the will of the LORD to crush Him.” It was the sovereign will of God the Father that Jesus be crushed and crucified. When we think about the cross we often blame the Jewish religious elite, the Roman soldiers who tortured Him, or Judas who betrayed Him. But we must recognize that the cross had always been the Father’s plan for the Son. As Isaiah peered through the corridors of history he saw the New Testament reality, “*Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. (Acts 2:23)*” The suffering of Jesus was God’s program to save the world.

Jesus’ suffering on the cross was suffering by design. It was God’s sovereign design that Jesus should be crushed for our salvation. It was the Father’s sovereign will and the Son submitted to it. The remarkable thing about the cross was that Jesus knew full well how terrible it was going to be, but He submitted His life and His will to the will of God. God was sovereign, and Jesus was submissive. In John’s Gospel, Jesus states in John 10:18, “*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.*” (John 10:18) Jesus willingly laid down His life on the cross. He was committed to His suffering for our salvation.

### **Conclusion:**

The incredible paradox of the Kingdom of God is that its Sovereign King is a Suffering Servant. Jesus, who reigns in heaven yet served us on earth by laying down His life. God’s Kingdom is inaugurated on the cross. All those who enter the Kingdom of God must enter by the way of the cross. It is where we realize that all the world has to offer is dead to us, and we to it. Behold, the cross that brought our Lord to die brings us to live.

### **Additional Resources :**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/C/cross.html>

The Cross of Christ – John Stott

The Cruciality of the Cross – P.T. Forsyth

The Power of the Blood of Jesus – Andrew Murray

Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ – John Piper

The MacArthur Study Bible

The Wiersbe Study Bible