

High and Exalted (13): The Suffering Servant

(Isaiah 52-53)

I. Introduction

- A. When Alexander died in 323, his empire was left to his generals
 - 1. Two most powerful were Ptolemy (Egypt) and Seleucus (Syria)
 - a. Ptolemies and Seleucids fought each other (*Israel as buffer zone*)
 - b. For almost 300 years, Israel was kicked around like a football
 - 2. In 168, Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria marched to attack Egypt
 - a. Emissary from an obscure country no one had heard of met him
 - 1) He was told if he attacked, he'd face the wrath of Rome
 - 2) It was a bluff; Rome didn't have power to impose its will
 - b. Antiochus fell for it; he turned army around and marched home
 - 3. But he was in a foul mood, so he decided to kick around the Jews
 - a. He sacrificed a pig at Temple and tried to force villages to do so
 - b. A priest Mattathias rebelled and started a war against Antiochus
 - 1) He had a son Judas, later renamed Maccabeus ("hammer")
 - 2) He led an unlikely revolt that led to Jewish independence
- B. When Jesus appeared on the scene, Messianic expectation was high
 - 1. Israel was an occupied country and Rome controlled everything
 - a. Rome did everything from taxation to appointing high priest
 - b. First century Jews were longing for the coming of the Messiah
 - 1) They wanted Judas Maccabeus; they wanted "hammer time"
 - 2) They wanted a Messiah to drive the Romans into the sea
 - 3) They wanted a Messiah who would be a king like David
 - c. So when the Messiah came, they missed him (**Acts 3:13-15**)
 - 2. **Question:** Can't we understand the confusion of 1st century Jews
 - a. The OT had promised a Messiah and a new kingdom, right?
 - b. Isaiah describes the Messiah in four "Songs of the Servant"
 - 1) We'll look at the last of those songs today in **Isaiah 52-53**
 - 2) What would've happened if Jews saw Jesus through Isaiah?

II. The Suffering Servant

A. The Servant's Mission

1. David McKenna calls text “*Mt. Everest of messianic prophesy*”
 - a. I’m going to read this text as talking about Jesus the Messiah
 - b. **Factoid:** Rabbis read this as Messianic text until Middle Ages
 - 1) Gradually they came to see Israel as Suffering Servant
 - 2) You can understand; Jews do get beat up pretty regularly
 - c. Song (call it “*poem*” so I don’t sing) has 5 stanzas of 3 vss each
 - d. The first stanza is an overview or introduction to the Servant
2. All aspects of the Messianic mission are laid out here (**52:13-15**)
 - a. God servant would succeed in His mission and be exalted (**13**)
 - b. But he would be horribly disfigured (**14**) *The Passion of Christ*
 - c. His mission would include “the nations” or Gentiles (**15a**)
 - 1) “*Sprinkle*” here may refer to the ritual purification of blood
 - 2) Hebrew word can be “*He will startle many nations*” (NLT)
 - d. In some way, those on the outside looking in will see (**15b**)
3. What we get from all this is that the Messiah would be startling

B. The Suffering Servant (**Isa 53:1**)

1. Isaiah is expecting quite a lot of his hearers, “who will believe us”
 - a. Remember, he is here speaking forward to the exile community
 - b. This isn’t the kind of Messiah they had on their Hanukah list!
2. Servant would come quietly and be nothing to look at (**Isa 53:2**)
 - a. Israel liked her kings to be good looking– Saul, David, Absalom
 - 1) Messiah, not so much. He didn’t come with a big fuss
 - 2) Nothing impressive in his appearance... looks or entry
 - b. Jesus was questioned/rejected because his origins (Nazareth?)
3. Isaiah stresses that God’s servant would be rejected (**Isa 53:3**)
 - a. He would not come as a conquering hero, but as a rejected one
 - b. He was a man of sorrow; he knew hurt, hatred and humiliation
 - c. As Isaiah continues, he tells us what he was hurt and hated

C. The Servant's Sacrifice (Isa 53:3-6)

1. We say that Peter preached the first gospel sermon on Pentecost
 - a. Isaiah preached Peter's sermon 800 years before Pentecost
 - b. Isaiah tells us not only WHAT but WHY; this is all for US!
 - 1) He took our pain, was pierced for our sin, took our stripes
 - 2) He was punished by God, but He was punished for us
 - c. His punishment brings us peace; His wounds bring us healing
 - d. God took our sins and laid it upon Him, and he took them away
2. It is fashionable to argue over the theological meaning of cross
 - a. It is primarily a substitutional atonement or victory over evil
 - b. These are word pictures, not obtuse theological abstractions
 - 1) In some way, Jesus died on the cross so we can live
 - 2) In some way, His humiliation and defeat give us victory
 - 3) In some way, His death and His defeat gives us the victory
 - c. At cross God acts to do what we can't do ourselves (2 Cor 5:21)

D. The Servant's Innocence (Isa 53:7-9)

1. In Gethsemane, Jesus could call 12 legions of angels (72,000)
 - a. **Question:** What was the expiration date on God's offer?
 - b. Could Jesus still have called all those angels the next
 - 1) When they mocked him, spit on him and nailed him to cross
 - 2) When they mocked him, "*If you're the Son of God, then...*"
2. So why didn't He call the angels? I would have called the angels!
 - a. He didn't call for angels because He was willing sacrifice
 - 1) It wasn't that God sent Jesus to the cross— he sent Himself
 - 2) It wasn't nails that held Jesus on the cross; it was His love
 - b. Isaiah stresses here the absolute innocence of God's Servant
 - 1) He didn't open his mouth to defend himself... he could have
 - 2) Gospels are filled with Jesus making leaders look plain silly
 - 3) But when it came to the final act, he chose to remain silent
3. He allowed himself to be killed; it was his purpose (final point)

E. The Servant's Purpose

1. All through this stanza is a contrast between before and after—
 - a. He suffers as offering for sin, but see offspring and prosper ([10](#))
 - b. He suffers and bears iniquity, but he will see the light of life ([11](#))
 - c. He bore the sin of many but has a portion among the great ([12](#))
2. How can the Servant both dies for sin and be highly exalted?
 - a. That doesn't make sense... and makes all the sense in the world
 - b. Because that is the very heart of the gospel ([1 Cor 15:3-4](#))
 - c. Paul likely has Isaiah's song in mind as he wrote his ([Phil 2:8-9](#))

III. Conclusion

- A. The heart of the gospel is not some of the things claimed for it
 1. It's not, someone said, to just treat other people well (*we are*)
 - a. It's not about building big churches or programs (*we should*)
 - b. It's not about having uplifting worship experiences (*we should*)
 - c. It is not about being responsible stewards of planet (*we should*)
 - d. It's not about helping those who desperately need help (*should*)
 2. The gospel is that in Christ, the love of God acted to save sinners
 - a. The gospel is that Christ came to save sinners and that's us
 - b. The gospel is that Jesus died and was raised— and so can we be
- B. There's another side, right? We're put on notice by God's servant
 1. The message of the cross is something that we must live
 - a. Jesus died for us, so we must die for others ([1 John 3:16-17](#))
 - b. Jesus picked up a cross; we must pick up ours ([Luke 9:23-24](#))
 2. Message of the Servant is not one that we can just HEAR
 - a. It is one that we must also live out before God and others
 - b. Salvation is the free gift of God, but it places us under a debt
 - c. Just as suffering servant died for us, so must we live for him
 3. As we sing "*Our God Reigns*" ask if he really reigns over you