

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Easter Message (2019): His visage was so marred

Today's subject is the suffering of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, on the Cross of Calvary, as foretold in the book of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

The subject comes to its climax in the fifteen verses from Isaiah 52:13-53:12. They readily divide into five sections of three verses each. This is one of the most frequently quoted Old Testament portions in the New Testament.

The theme? The Lord Jesus Christ specifically came into the world to die (Mark 10:45). His suffering must precede His exaltation. For instance, Luke 24:26 says: "*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter His glory?*" And in 1 Peter 1:11, we read about: "*the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*" Isaiah's very vivid description of Calvary is in the form of a song, given long before the events took place. The song ends on a note of victory.

The different aspects of the sufferings of Christ might well be distinguished in various themes:

1. **Suffering for the will of God.** In line with all scripture, we must start from God's side. All that took place during the life upon earth of the Lord Jesus was working towards one end. That was the completion and establishment of the will of God
2. **Suffering in His life upon earth.** The sufferings He endured, during His life, and the moral beauties and glories that shone out in every test and trial.
3. **Suffering during the closing stages of that life.** A survey of the major elements, with suffering in the garden of Gethsemane central, but including references to aspects coming out in all four Gospels.
4. **Suffering as God's Perfect Servant.** The climax of His Perfect Life of dependent service was being delivered up to the death of the Cross, and God's answer to it.
5. **Suffering for sin.** The intensity of the sufferings of Christ at Calvary as the one sacrifice for sin. The glories that shone out in them. The effect and fruit of that mighty work. Those specified as being brought into wonderful blessing in association with Him:
 - a. The Christian church;
 - b. The Nation of Israel;
 - c. The Gentile Nations.

Section 1: Isaiah 52:13-15

First, then, in Section 1, Isaiah 52:13-15, Jehovah, the God of Israel, speaks, giving a summary of what will transpire. He contemplates His Anointed Servant, first put to shame, but eventually on the summit of glory before every eye. His early extreme humiliation will lead to His ultimate glory.

The omniscient God gives first an outline of events as they will eventually unfold. The blessing, anticipated in Isaiah 52:7-10, that will come to the nation of Israel, will not be deserved because of anything they have done. It will be the outcome of the activities of Jehovah's Suffering Servant, Whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Overall, "*He shall deal prudently*" (Isaiah 52:13); the kind of judicious activity that leads eventually to prosperity.

But, first of all, when He presents Himself to His earthly people, the nation of Israel shall give their answer to Him. They don't want Him.

Totally rejected! Terribly abused by the nation He came to save! The overall agony of His sufferings shall be so intense that the onlookers will be absolutely appalled at His very appearance. He shall be barely recognisable as a man at all. Then, after His cruel death, God will make plain His estimation of Him. From the tomb, "*He shall be*

exalted" (Isaiah 52:13) - in resurrection. Then, *"He shall be extolled"* (Isaiah 52:13) - in ascension. After that, *"He shall be made very high"* (Isaiah 52:13) - in heavenly glory at the right hand of God. Many were astonished, dismayed, even shocked, at His extreme humiliation on the Cross. Many will be equally startled, absolutely astounded, at His glory and majesty when, at His public appearing, they see Him "high and lifted up" in glory.

But, before God describes the Cross of Calvary in detail, He tells us the final outcome. We are assured, at the very outset, that Jehovah's Servant will not be a failure. He will succeed. He will surely accomplish the will of God.

Section 2: Isaiah 53:1-3

In Section 2, Isaiah 53:1-3, the future godly remnant defines Israel's position, nationally. This prophecy was given in, say, about the eighth century BC. It describes what the reaction and response of the godly remnant of Israel will be when their Messiah appears *"with power and great glory"* (Matthew 24:30) in, let us say, the early part of the 21st century AD. They will then pass their own judgment about what their own nation did to Him and said to and about Him. In about, say, the year 30 AD, the nation so decisively rejected and crucified Him. The prophecy looks forward to a time when the then godly remnant will look back to assess how their nation treated Him when He lived here upon earth.

The remnant will trace the past guilty blindness of the nation, and their total misjudgment of His life and death. Who will believe the true report of the remnant? (Isaiah 53:1). Very few! A mere, tiny minority! They describe His early life and development. *"He shall grow up before [His God]"* (Isaiah 53:2). Indeed He did! Luke 2:40 says, *"the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him."*

Luke 2:52 goes on to say, *"and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."* He was like a tender plant - a tiny sucker - sprouting up from the root of the tree, growing alongside it, but distinct from it! Having a life of its own, not dependent on the main part of the tree for anything! *"Out of a dry ground!"* This is surely a picture of spiritually barren, spiritually lifeless Israel. No wonder they saw *"no form nor lordliness in Him"* (Isaiah 52:32 JN Darby Translation)! They said, *"there is no beauty that we should desire him."* To them, He was no Saul or Absalom. He displayed no brilliant, external splendour! There was no "outward show" in Him or His kingdom at that time, as the Lord Himself said in Luke 17:20.

There was indeed full, moral, inward perfection in Him, but they could not see it. Sadly, generally speaking, there has been no real change right up to the present day. Isaiah 53:3 says, significantly, *"He is despised and rejected..."* Not only was, but is! This is still a true assessment of the attitude of the general mass of the Jewish nation to their long-promised Messiah. He is, still, in their eyes, *"a man of sorrows."* (Isaiah 53:23) Men much prefer an extravert, impressive leader. He was "acquainted with grief", (Isaiah 53:3) fully acquainted with it by personal experience. Israel nationally, and the world at large, did not want to know a Messiah, a Saviour, like that. They *"hid their faces from Him"* (Isaiah 53:3). They deliberately turned away, a very definite act of refusal and rejection.

Section 3: Isaiah 53:4-6

In Section 3, Isaiah 53:4-6, the remnant speaks of Messiah as their Substitute. In His life and ministry on earth, the Lord Jesus relieved many afflictions, especially among Jews. He healed their diseases; He gave sight to the blind, even raising the dead. But it was not just a question of performing physical miracles. There is a lovely, well-known statement summing up what He did, and the way that He did it. It is this.

First, He bore in His spirit, what He then dismissed with His power. He bore their griefs and sicknesses sympathetically. He carried their sorrows as a burden.

Think of John 11:35, *"Jesus wept"*. Virtue, health, flowed out of Him, and He was conscious of it. Luke 8:45 records His sensitivity, *"Who touched me?"* He asked when the woman touched the hem of His garment. He knew, of course, but He wanted her to testify to her trust in Him.

What was the final answer of those He came to serve? He was stricken (Isaiah 53:4). His **body** was roughly abused by men. They thought God was smiting Him, in His **soul**, as an impostor. They thought that He thoroughly deserved it. He was afflicted; browbeaten; intellectually intimidated in His **spirit**, even before they actually nailed Him to the Cross. Even then, of the six hours on the Cross, only the last three involved suffering from God.

Isaiah 53:5-6 give us the heart of the matter, so I shall quote them verbatim: *"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

Isaiah 53:5 relates to His death, His work of “atonement”; His death for our sins upon the Cross. Various terms are used in scripture to give us a sense of the different aspects of the Lord's sufferings. Think of the graphic description given. He was “wounded”, pierced through, by cruel, wicked men. The Lord suffered this in His **body**. He was “bruised” by men at the behest of Satan, as prophesied in Genesis 3:15. *“The chastisement of our peace was upon Him.”* This is the very basis of our spiritual peace. He accepted the punishment that we deserved for our sins. This is a spiritual matter. He suffered in His **spirit**. *“With His stripes we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:5) - made thoroughly whole, spiritually, in the sight of God. If ever we were to be brought into the peace of God, God's Suffering Servant must endure all this. Think of Acts 2:23, *“...Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”*

Man's worst and God's best were both revealed at the Cross of Calvary.

But, only an act of God can bring in salvation. The activities of sinful man cannot make any contribution at all to our eternal blessing.

Isaiah 53:6 emphasises our own responsibility in this:

- **All** - without exception!
- **We** - this is a universal situation!
- **Every one** - each individual!
- **His own way** - complete, self-centred independence!

You know, sheep have the facility to go astray on their own. One sheep finds a hole in the hedge. Then, of course, the rest of the flock inevitably quickly follow suit. But, each one needs help to get back.

Sin has had that same effect on the whole human race. Because of our sinful nature, and practice, we have an innate tendency to follow a bad example rather than a good one. But, how gracious our God is! *“The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6)

Section 4: Isaiah 53:7-9

In Section 4, Isaiah 53:7-9 tell us: Jehovah (the God of Israel) takes delight in the moral beauty which shone in His Suffering Servant Son, the long-promised Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the world, Jesus our Lord.

Isaiah 53:7 says:

- *“He was oppressed”* - in His **soul**;
- *“He was afflicted”* - in His **spirit**;
- *“He opened not His mouth”*, a member of His **body**

These things He did before the chief priests and elders and also before Pilate (Matthew 27:12 and Matthew 27:14). How precious the comment in 1 Peter 2:23. *“When he was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.”* He was content to wait for God to justify Him. He used neither violence in His actions nor corruption in what He thought and said. His mouth, a member of His **body**, gave expression to the thoughts of His **spirit** and the feelings of His **soul**.

Isaiah 53:8 says, *“He was taken from prison and from judgment.”* He was deprived of common justice. The alleged trial contravened all the legal rules applicable at the time. The whole procedure was riddled through with sheer corruption. It amounted to judicial murder.

The question is asked, *“Who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off [violently], out of the land of the living”*. Isaiah 53:10 will give us God's answer.

But, first, Isaiah 53:9 says, *“He made his grave with the wicked.”* His body was indeed to be buried in a garden to the north of Jerusalem, in a cliff face, on top of the hill Golgotha, a cemetery reserved for common criminals. But, God intervened. He was *“with the rich in his death”* (Isaiah 53:9). This term “rich one” is singular, identifiable as Joseph of Arimathea, mentioned with honour in each of the four Gospels (Matthew 27:57, Mark 15:43, Luke 23:50, John 19:38). The word “death” is in the plural, expressive of extreme intensity of suffering, bearing sin under the judgment of God.

Section 5: Isaiah 53:10-12

In Section 5, Isaiah 53:10-12 teach us that the godly remnant responds to the account of suffering, and ultimate glory. They counted upon Jehovah granting adequate recompense. Then Jehovah gives His final confirmatory declaration.

Isaiah 53:10, *"It pleased the LORD to bruise Him."* He was crushed, beaten, oppressed beneath the heavy burden of the wrath of God. He suffered this in His **soul**, when it was made a trespass offering. It was for the accomplishment of the will of God. Jehovah derived satisfaction, indeed joy, not from the suffering inflicted on the Messiah, but from the total devotion of His Suffering Servant Son and the results flowing from it. His God shall be pleased to give an appropriate answer to His devoted Servant. *"He shall see His seed"*. There will be fruit from His mighty work. Christians at the present time, Israel later, then the saved among the Gentiles, ultimately the cleansed universe!

"He shall prolong his days" (Isaiah 53:10). In all other cases of murder, the life of the victim is shortened. In this case, the life of the murdered man is prolonged. Listen to Revelation 1:18, *"I am he that liveth, and [became] dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; Amen."* Similarly, Psalm 102:24 pleads, *"take me not away in the midst of my days."* The immediate reply is in Psalm 102:27, *"thy years shall have no end."*

Isaiah 53:12. God will give Him *"a portion with the great"*, as we read in Philippians 2:9-11. Why? He *"poured out His soul unto death."* He did it voluntarily. He chose to do it. In this life the innocent do suffer for the guilty, but not willingly. This was an intelligent decision (John 10:17), an act of His personal **spirit**. He felt it keenly, in His **soul**. *"Unto death"* involved His **body**. *"Numbered with the transgressors"*, that is, classified as a common criminal (see Luke 23:13-43). He bore the weight of sin. He made intercession for His people, including the transgressors. He prayed for them because He felt for them, in His **soul** (Luke 23:34).

Conclusion

What conclusion should we draw from this study?

God has given an outline of the perfection of His Suffering Servant, His well-beloved Son! You might well say, "OK. That's fine. Very nice! But - so what? What difference does it make, or should it make, to you and me?" Among other things, this! Mankind as a race is sinful by nature and practice. But not only the race as a whole! It is true of every individual who has ever lived on earth, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Man is a tripartite being. He has spirit, and soul and body. Man has sinned in every part of his being; spirit, and soul, and body. This is given in painful detail in Romans 1. In incarnation, the Lord Jesus became fully man, with spirit, and soul, and body. In His life, in manhood upon earth, He was demonstrably perfect; in spirit, and soul, and body. He suffered sympathetically, in every part of His holy being (in spirit, and soul and body) with all who came to Him for help. In death, He suffered vicariously, for you and me, in every part of His being, in spirit, and soul, and body. And now God has fully vindicated Him; in spirit, and soul, and body.

What a wonderful Messiah! He shall eventually be owned, as such, by a godly, if depleted, remnant of the Nation of Israel. In the meantime, what a wonderful Saviour for all of us, Jew or Gentile, who, as individuals, trust Him as our Saviour, and confess Him as our Lord. Praise His Holy Name!

Thank you for listening to this *Truth for Today* talk number T1089, entitled "His visage was so marred", from our series named "Easter Message 2019."

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