

He Suffered to Save Us Isaiah 53:1-12

Dr. Christianson was a professor of religion at a small college. All incoming freshmen were required to take his survey class on Christianity regardless of their major. Although he tried to convey the essence of the gospel to his class, most refused to take Christianity seriously.

This particular year he had a special student named Steve who was studying for the ministry with the goal of entering seminary. Everyone liked him and as the starting center for the football team, was in incredible physical shape. He was also the best student in the professor's class.

One day Dr. Christianson asked Steve to stay after class to discuss an idea with him. He asked Steve how many pushups he could do. He told the professor that each night he did 200. The professor thought that was good but wondered if he could do 300. He had never done 300 at one time but thought he might be able to do that many. The professor needed him to be able to do 300 and wondered if it was possible if he did them in sets of 10. Steve said he could. The professor then explained what would happen in class that Friday.

Class time rolled around and Steve got there early and sat in the front row. The professor called their attention to a box of donuts on his desk. They weren't the ordinary glazed or plain donuts. They were the really fancy big kind with cream centers and frosting swirls. It was the last class of the day, so everyone was excited to end with a party.

The professor went to the first girl in the first row and asked if she would like a donut. Of course she said yes. The professor turned to Steve and asked if he would do 10 pushups so she could have a donut. He jumped down and did 10 quick pushups. The professor put a donut on her desk and went to the next person in the first row and asked if he would like a donut. Joe also responded with a yes. The professor turned to Steve and asked him to do 10 more pushups so that Joe could have a donut. When he was done, the professor put one on his desk.

Everyone in the first row wanted a donut and Steve did 10 pushups for each one.

When he came to the second row, the professor asked Scott if he would like a donut. He was on the basketball team and was in as good a shape as Steve. He asked the professor if he could do his own pushups for a donut. The professor told him that only Steve could do the pushups. Scott said if he couldn't do his own pushups, he didn't want a donut. The professor turned to Steve and asked if he would do 10 pushups for the donut Scott didn't want. When he was finished with the 10 pushups, the professor put a donut on Scott's desk. Scott objected saying he didn't want it, but the professor told him he could just leave it on his desk. It was his class, his rules, his donuts.

They finished the second row and Steve was starting to slow down. Perspiration was beginning to bead up on his face. In the third row, Jenny refused a donut, but Steve did 10 pushups for her right to reject the offer. She still received a donut.

As the professor began down the fourth row a growing uneasiness filled the room. More students were saying no to their donut but receiving one anyway after Steve completed each set of 10 pushups. By now his arms and face were beginning to turn red as it took more effort to complete the required 10 pushups per student. Students from other classes started to enter the classroom. The professor did a quick head count to make sure he had enough donuts. There were now 34 students. He continued from desk to desk asking the same question, giving them a donut whether they accepted or refused his gift. Each time Steve did the required 10 pushups.

When another student attempted to enter, the other students told him to stay out, but Steve insisted that he should have the opportunity to enter. Dr. Christianson asked the newest student if he wanted a donut. Not knowing what was going on, Steve did 10 pushups so that Jason could have a donut.

After completing the fourth row, Dr. Christianson then went to each visitor seated around the room.

With shaky arms, every pushup took effort. The only noise in the room was Steve's heavy breathing. There were no dry eyes as all the students watched Steve labor to complete each set of 10 pushups. The last student to be offered a donut wondered if she could help Steve do his pushups, but the professor reminded her that Steve had to do them alone. He had given the task to him and he was in charge of seeing that every student had the opportunity to get a donut whether they wanted it or not.

The professor went on to say that when he decided to have a party, he took out his grade book and Steve was the only one who had a perfect grade. He never missed a class, failed a test, or turned in inferior work. Steve told the professor that when someone messed up in football practice, that person had to do pushups. Dr. Christianson told Steve that no one in the class could come to the party unless he paid the price by doing their pushups. Both of them had made a deal for the sake of each student.

He then asked Steve to do the 10 pushups for the last student. As Steve finished all that was required of him, he collapsed on the floor.

Dr. Christianson then turned to the class and said that the Savior, Jesus Christ, while hanging on the cross, lifted His voice to the Father said it is finished, into Your hands I commit My Spirit. With the understanding that He had done everything that was required of Him, He yielded up His life. Like many in the room, who didn't want their donut, many leave the gift of eternal life on their desk uneaten. Whether or not you choose to accept the gift Christ paid on the cross by taking our sin and penalty on Himself, the price of our debt has been paid. It would be foolish to leave it sitting there.

Max Lucado once stated **“You can afford many wrong choices in life. You can choose the wrong career and survive, the wrong city and survive, the wrong house and survive. But there is one choice that must be made correctly, and that is your eternal destiny.”** Easter is a reminder of the pivotal choice and whether or not we have made the correct one when it comes to our destiny.

Our text today was written 700 years before the events of Easter that include the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The prophet Isaiah gives us a snapshot of the life and purpose of Christ. We will be looking primarily at **Isaiah 53**, but the passage actually begins in **52:13** where we are introduced to the suffering servant. This is a prophetic passage looking forward to the coming Messiah who we come to know in the Gospels as Jesus Christ. He is the suffering servant who is the Savior of our text.

We begin by noting first the appearance of the suffering Savior.

I. THE APPEARANCE OF THE SUFFERING SAVIOR – vv. 1-3

The prophet begins with two questions: The first asks **“who has believed our message?”**

Romans 10:14-19a

In our age of technology and instant access to information, it is easy to become skeptical about the news. We hear one thing from one source and hear something entirely opposite from another source. It's hard to know who to really trust these days with accurate information.

When it comes to the message of the prophets, who has believed the message?

Who has believed the message about the gospel?

The message wasn't just for Israel, it was also for the Gentiles as well.

Isaiah wrote an earlier passage that spoke of this servant. It speaks of His character and the new covenant He would establish by His death. He would be a light to the Gentiles.

Isaiah 42:6 “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant to the people and a light to the Gentiles.”

Who would believe this message?

When Jesus came to earth as a baby, the religious leaders rejected the news about His coming. They refused to accept all the prophetic signs and firsthand eyewitness reports around His birth. When He began His earthly ministry, they wouldn't accept

that Jesus was the Messiah even with His miracles. Those from the town where He grew up in Nazareth didn't believe His message either. Scripture says He didn't do many miracles there because of unbelief.

We also read in **John 6:66** that many of His followers left Him because they couldn't accept what He had to say about the cost of following Him.

Pilate, Herod, and the Roman soldiers wouldn't believe the truth about Him either.

Just as many in Isaiah's day and in Christ's didn't accept Him, many in our day will not believe the gospel message about Him so they can be saved.

Who has believed our message?

The second question asks **“to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”**

The arm of the Lord refers to His power.

In just a few chapters Isaiah will pen that **“the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear.” (Isaiah 59:1)**

The message of salvation in this suffering servant, is not limited in reach to just a few, nor is it limited to only those who aren't notorious sinners. It is available to all who both hear and respond.

Unfortunately as Isaiah points out in what he writes that few in Israel would value the servant or believe the message about Him coming from God.

So who is this suffering servant that will be rejected? Isaiah goes on to give us a description.

He would grow up from a tender shoot. This is a reference to His lineage. He would come from the root of Jesse and be a descendant of King David.

Isaiah 11:1 “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

The Branch refers to the Messiah, who is Christ. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem a week earlier, on what we call Palm Sunday, the shouting crowd called Him the **“Son of David.”** It was a popular title among the Jews for the coming Messiah.

In 2013, Pakistan set a world record by planting

almost 850,000 trees in a single day. In 2016, India broke that record by planting over 49 million trees in one day. Then in 2019, Ethiopia shattered the record by planting 350 million trees in the country in 12 hours. Their goal was to populate the forests and preserve natural life.

Trees have long been a symbol of life. In our passage and elsewhere throughout Scripture the Messiah is referred to as a Branch. Jesus is that Branch who gives life. He is the root who sprang up from the stump. After Babylon stormed into Jerusalem and deported the king, no more kings sat on the throne. It's symbolized by this stump. But Isaiah says a tender shoot will spring up like a root out of dry ground. We have all seen a tree growing up out of a stump. Life is still there, and Isaiah says that this servant will spring up as if to say it would come from dry ground. He would have a humble existence. He wouldn't be born in a royal palace or have all the amenities that royalty would be accustomed to. His beginning would be humble.

Isaiah continues by telling us that there wouldn't be anything about Him by which we would be attracted to Him. Nothing about His appearance or about His position would make us sit up and take notice of Him. He didn't even look like He came from royalty. What we read about Him in **verse 2** is the reason they rejected Him. He didn't fit their profile and consequently they wrote Him off. He was the stone the builders rejected.

Arguably one of the greatest basketball players in history, Michael Jordan was cut from his High School basketball team. He was overlooked by the coach but went on to have a stellar career.

The Messiah would have **“no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.”**

He wouldn't be a man of exceptional good looks, no broad shoulders or muscular physique, no rugged jaw or handsome facial features. He was ordinary, nothing that stood out or made heads turn when He walked by.

He was despised, a word that means to look down on with contempt and scorn, to dislike, or be repulsed by. How many times in the Gospels do we read that the religious leaders scorned Him? He was rejected. The dictionary defines it as something you throw off or fling back. It's something you refuse to take or keep because it has no value. It is worthless or useless.

Over the years as we have done some digging around the house, we have uncovered things like broken bottles, pieces of iron and an old muffler. They were discarded by the previous owner because those items had no more value except to fill a hole.

To those who reject the Messiah, they consider His life and His message and His salvation of no value. He would experience sorrow, which literally means pain. The Hebrew word speaks both of physical and mental pain.

In **Matthew 16:21** Jesus told the disciples that He would suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders.

At Friday's service we read Matthew's account beginning with Peter's denial all the way through the crucifixion. It is a sober reminder of all Christ endured on our behalf – both the physical abuse of being beaten, scourged with whips, pierced by nails and a spear, then the mental anguish of His prayer in the garden, the denial by one of His closest companions, the betrayal, the desertion of all His disciples, the lengthy trial and false allegations, taking on sin and then His Father forsaking Him. And that was in less than a 24-hour period.

People refused to give Him a second look. They didn't think He was important. That is the appearance of the suffering Savior.

In **verses 4-9** we see the affliction of the suffering Savior.

II. THE AFFLICTION OF THE SUFFERING SAVIOR – vv. 4-9

It is abundantly clear from our passage that God is the one who put this suffering servant Christ,

through the suffering He endured.

Verse 4 says He was stricken by God.

Verse 6 says the Lord laid on Him our iniquities. Even though He was counted with the criminals, convicted of a bogus crime, His crucifixion wasn't for anything He had done. He was without sin.

II Corinthians 5:21

Hebrews 4:15

Hebrews 7:26-27

I Peter 1:18-19

I Peter 3:18

At His birth, the angel described Him as the Holy One.

At His trial, Pilate's wife told him not to have anything to do with that righteous man.

After He died on the cross, the centurion said surely this man was righteous.

Even demons He encountered called Him the Holy One of God.

Jesus said of Himself that there was no falsehood in Him. He was sinless, yet we are nothing like Him.

Isaiah says that we are all just like sheep who wander and go astray. We go our own way, do our own thing. The Bible is abundantly clear that we all have sinned. We aren't a sinner because we sin, we sin because we are a sinner.

Job says that man is abominable and corrupt.

Solomon declared that there isn't anyone who doesn't sin.

John wrote that if we claim we don't have any sin, then we deceive ourselves.

And Paul writes that no one is righteous.

All those who condemned Christ and demanded His execution by crucifixion thought He was guilty of His own sins and deserved to die. Yet it's clear from our passage that God was the one who laid our sins on Him, to die in our place, crushed for our iniquities. The sinless one took on our sin. The punishment He endured brought us peace, it paid our debt, satisfied God's wrath for sin. Death was demanded as payment and Christ took on our sin and died in our place. He did that for us.

I Peter 2:24

II Corinthians 5:18-19, 21

Romans 5:1-2, 6-11

Romans 8:1-3

Here is what I don't get. Our passage tells us that we were the ones who despised Him. We were the ones who rejected Him. We might as well have been at the crucifixion and been counted among the ones who beat Him, and whipped Him, and spit in His face, and mocked Him, and taunted Him and drove the nails in His hands because all sin past, present, and future, the sins of Adam and Eve, the sins of my parents and great-great-grand parents, my sins, your sins, the sins of our children and grandchildren, the sins of Genghis Khan, and Stalin and Hitler, anyone and everyone were all bound to Him as He hung on the cross. He willingly did that.

Why would He do that for me?

Why would He do that for someone Scripture says was an enemy to Him?

Why would He do that for those who He knew would choose to reject Him and scorn Him and betray Him and mock Him?

Dottie Rambo helps put it into perspective with her song "If That Isn't Love".

He left the splendor of heaven
Knowing His destiny
Was the lonely hill of Golgotha
There to lay down His life for me

If that isn't love
Then the ocean is dry
There's no stars in the sky
And the little sparrows can't fly
If that isn't love
Then heaven's a myth
There's no feeling like this
If that isn't love
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The justice of God demands payment for sin and we are all guilty, yet the Bible tells us the degree and depth to which God would go in order to remove the penalty from us. It isn't in anything we could ever do. It isn't in anything we are. God did it because He is love and He loved the world so much He sent His only Son to die in our place so that we wouldn't perish according to His wrath but have everlasting life for those who would believe. That

gift is like that donut placed on those students' desks. Someone else paid for them to receive it, but it was their choice to accept it or reject it.

Sin must be punished so God laid the punishment not on the sheep who deserved it, but on His servant, Jesus Christ, who then died for each lost sheep. He died willingly for each of us. He did for us what we could not do. He took the penalty we deserve.

If that isn't love.

We will never know the degree of what Christ endured to purchase our salvation, to pay our debt. The words of Elizabeth Clephane give us a glimpse. But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

Think of all that He endured for you and me in what Isaiah writes. Here it is from the Message.

The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum. But the fact is, it was *our* pains he carried, *our* disfigurements, all the things wrong with *us*. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was *our* sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—*our* sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed. We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him.⁷⁻⁹ He was beaten, he was tortured, but he didn't say a word. Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered and like a sheep being sheared, he took it all in silence. Justice miscarried, and he was led off—and did anyone

really know what was happening? He died without a thought for his own welfare, beaten bloody for the sins of my people. They buried him with the wicked, threw him in a grave with a rich man. Even though he'd never hurt a soul or said one word that wasn't true.

Oh, dear friends, if that isn't love. But while He died for you and me, He also lives for you and me. Praise God the resurrection happened. The final verses speak of the advocacy of the suffering Savior.

III. THE ADVOCACY OF THE SUFFERING SAVIOR – vv. 10-12

From human perspective we would claim that He died in the prime of His life without anything. He didn't even leave any physical descendants. Yet Isaiah makes it clear that death was not the end for the suffering Savior. **Verse 10** says He will see His offspring, and His days will be prolonged. That is speaking of spiritual offspring, those who by faith believe and will be given eternal life. That His days will be prolonged refers to the eternal nature of His existence. He will live forever.

Isaiah 9:7

After satisfying the debt owed, Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father, waiting for the day He is told to bring His offspring home.

Through what the suffering Savior endured, Isaiah says He will justify many. That means we are declared righteous or we are made in right standing with God. He no longer sees us as sinners, we are no longer His enemies. This servant has advocated on our behalf with His Father through His death. He took the nails for you and me and showed them to His Father and said "I did this for them."

J. Vernon McGee simply put it "He took our hell that we might have His heaven."

This past Friday, Good Friday, was the 110th anniversary of the tragic sinking of the Titanic. There were over 2,200 people on Board from all walks of life. Some were wealthy and famous. Others scarcely had anything except what they

carried onto the ship. They were known only by a family and friends. Yet when the tragedy became known and loved ones frantically scrambled to get any news about those on board, everyone was identified by one of two categories: lost or found.

Today each one of us is identified as one of those two categories. We are either lost or found. **Luke 19:10** says that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. **So in which category are you?**

Centuries ago Portuguese settlers built an enormous cathedral on the south coast of China. They believed it would weather time and marked their achievement with a massive bronze cross as the centerpiece of its front wall. Not too many years later, a typhoon swept through and destroyed the building leaving only the portion of wall and the cross.

Many years later a shipwreck stranded hundreds of men not far from that same harbor. One man clinging to some wreckage was disoriented and frightened because he had lost sight of the land in the storm. Yet each time the ocean swelled lifting him on top of the waves, he spotted the cross, which eventually guided him to safety.

For millions, the cross of the suffering Savior has become a symbol of hope and rescue from the pending doom of sin.

**The cross upon which Jesus died,
Is a shelter in which we can hide;
And its grace so free is sufficient for me,
And deep is its fountain – as wide as the sea.**

**There's room at the cross for you;
There's room at the cross for you.
Tho' millions have come,
There's still room for one.
Yes, there's room at the cross for you.**

Mark 10:45 tells us that Jesus was a servant who came to give His life as a ransom for many. He is an advocate for our transgressions by taking them on Himself, suffering the punishment we deserve, but giving us eternal life by grace through faith. He paid for you to have eternal life. Don't leave His gift sitting on the table.