

Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Theme: The exalted, but appalling Servant.

We are starting our study in the 4th Servant song in Isaiah. It divides into 5 parts of 3 verses each, which means the chapter division is not helpful as 52:13-15 and chapter 53 are all the same song! This is a most remarkable song and we are looking at awesome and holy things in it. I suppose we could say in a sense we are on holy ground, even entering the holy of holies in OT writing. Some have said that the last 3 verses in Chapter 52 contains in seed form all that will be opened up on in chapter 53. Some have compared it to the overture of the Symphony in chapter 53 - where we will see a grandeur that will be contrasted with dark, dark sombre passages. These are important verses to consider and note, for they lay out for us the themes in sketch form in the chapter ahead. Yet in these verses, the order of the themes is reversed to those in chapter 53, as these verses here have success and triumph first and then the apparent lack of it. Let's see 5 things in these verses.

1. The Identity Acknowledged. (v13a)

The song begins with “See” (NIV), or better “Behold” (*other versions*) as it draws our attention to someone well worth taking time to consider, to think about, to find out about. As we saw last time, these Servant songs (*there are 4 of them*) occur in the part of Isaiah's prophecy which speak of future events - the captivity in Babylon and the deliverance from it. Until this point, chapter 52 has been speaking of the deliverance from captivity and then we have this Servant song and in it there is this change of emphasis from earthly deliverance, to the Deliverer. We are to see, consider, behold Him who we have revealed in the Servant songs, but revealed in the NT as the Lord Jesus.

He is again designated “*my servant*” - our attention is on this amazing, awesome person who we read of and looked briefly at last time in 42:1-9; 49:1-7 & 50:4-9. This One is unique, is special, in fact the NT’s use of these passages show us that this One is sent from God directly and is God the Son.

This Servant has authority, has something important to do and say; so, we are to consider, see, behold Him. Realise this is not an invitation if we feel like it, it is an authoritative summons to all of us, whether we are young or old - “*Behold my Servant*”. The question is are we ready and willing to take time to consider, to behold this One? We need to give careful thought about this.

2. The Glory Accomplished. (v13b)

The Servant of the Lord would act wisely, prudently, or as the footnote says “*will prosper*”. This means He has the wisdom to do intelligent and effective actions. This Servant will be successful because of His wise and prudent actions. He has God’s Spirit upon Him (42:1) and all He does will be right, wise, prudent. This needs to be noted here at the start, because it will appear that He is being punished for wrong doing, but at the start it is stated that He will act wisely in all His person, life and what His mission will involve.

His success will lead to Him being given a position of glorious prominence - as we see in this 2nd part of the verse “*he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.*” This Servant is marked out as someone who is given a position of great glory because of all He accomplishes. Matthew Henry wrote “*God shall exalt Him, men shall extol Him, and with both He shall be very high,*

higher than the highest, higher than the heavens. He shall prosper in His work, and succeed in it, and that shall raise Him very high.”

There are 3 Hebrew words used in the last part of this verse to express the glory He will accomplish, be given – translated in NIV as “*raised up, lifted up, highly exalted*”. Isaiah has used 2 of these words together twice before in his writings – most dramatically in 6:1 (*also 33:10*). This Servant is definitely not to be seen as someone ordinary who could potentially achieve something special, but He is to be seen as the Lord and hyper exalted c.f. Philippians 2:9. This One is to have the same honour as God Almighty - not as a blasphemy, but as a right. Some commentators see in these 3 verbs hints at stages of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus - His resurrection, ascension and His enthronement at the right hand of the Father.

This One, by His servanthood and work will accomplish and gain great glory. What a picture we have presented to us - the Son of God, the Servant, in all His accomplished glory and success. We are to behold Him as He is now - not baby Jesus, or gentle Jesus meek and mild, but the awesome One, now hyper exalted, the centre of heaven’s worship and attention - there is no need to say “*Behold*” to all those who worship Him as they surround His throne.

We are shown this, we are to consider this and keep it in mind, because God is going to show us the great darkness this One plunged into, because we are shown and taken to the cross of Calvary and all its horrors – as we see:

3. The Suffering Inflicted. (v14)

Having shown us and given us the supreme exaltation of the Servant, we have a shocking and extreme contrast. The Hebrew in the first line addresses the Saviour directly “You or Thee” (*see NIV footnote*). We would expect this One to be admired, honoured for all His wise and prudent life, for serving God completely. We would expect people to applaud, but not so, for many are appalled by and at Him. If His exaltation and glorification will be the highest and the best, His suffering is the deepest and the worst!

This word appalled, astonished is a very graphic and strong word meaning “*astonished, appalled, stunned, causing horror, devastate*”. We may have been disgusted, appalled by some event we’ve seen on the news, read in the papers or experienced first-hand - it may have made us shudder, feel sick, caused us to cry and that is something of the force of the word here - it is something of a gut wrenching horror, disgust and sickening shock. As people looked at this One, this glorious Servant, as they saw Him, He would appear as One so disgusting, it would cause this horror, astonishment and shock.

People would be appalled by His appearance and form. Yet He was the One they should applaud, so why this misunderstanding, this gross revulsion? It is because of His disfigurement! It does not mean He is more disfigured than anyone else has ever been, but the Hebrew indicates that His disfigurement was so great that He no longer looked human. The marring of His form beyond human likeness indicates He no longer resembled a man, now He’s thing, a piece of mutilated meat!

This disfigurement and marring are not merely on a physical level. Jesus suffered horribly in His trial and crucifixion, but He is spiritually disfigured beyond what we can imagine or grasp. He is the perfect One and His eternal soul is perfect and pure, but He was spiritually disfigured and marred. There on the cross He was disfigured from head to foot and in His soul, His holy soul, as well as His body, and He no longer looks human. Now He is a thing of horror, a thing of our unimaginable nightmares.

Some people say we suffer hell on earth. Yet that is not true, for hell has no joy or love or delight in it. Yet there was one occasion when there truly was hell on earth - it occurred here on this Servant when He was disfigured when He took all the torment and punishment of God's people for their sin on Himself and He became an appalling, terrifying agony of disfigurement.

Yet this is still the One we are to behold, to consider and to see! We are to realise that if He went through all this as God's Servant, to accomplish what God wanted and has been given such glory and honour, then we need to pay attention to Him. The suffering with which He was afflicted caused Him to be hyper glorified and this is relevant for us, for all people today and through all ages. Moving on we see:

4. The Ministry Achieved. (v15a)

This glorious one, this appalling One achieved something startling when He was so disfigured and marred; for by this disfiguring, this marring many nations i.e. people the whole world round, will be sprinkled and they will be the better for it. His disfiguring was to result in Him doing something for others,

something they themselves could never ever do for themselves or anyone else. He purifies these ones.

Where do I get this from? The word “*sprinkle*” is a technical word used in OT sacrifices and worship. The Mosaic worship laws and ceremonies involve sprinkling of water, oil or bloods as a cleansing and purifying rite. The high priest, the priests had to be ceremonially clean to perform this rite that made the sprinkled worshippers ritually pure.

The Lord Jesus is described as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” - John the Baptist pointed his disciples to Jesus by saying “*Behold the Lamb of God...*” (John 1:29) Jesus, the Servant, in His sufferings was fulfilling all OT sacrifices to clean and to purify His people from sin’s guilt, power and condemnation. In His agonising disfigurement He was achieving the cleansing of people from many, all nations. This was a staggering thought to the Jews who considered non-Jews as dogs, as vermin. Yet this had already been hinted at in some of the other Servant songs e.g. 42:6; 49:6.

In His disfigurement He would seem as an accursed thing, a thing to be suffering for His own wrongdoing, but this was not the case. He was suffering on behalf of, in place of His people the world over and throughout all ages. By His suffering, His disfigurement, He would sprinkle and cleanse many people of all nations. His pain and suffering are intimately entwined with the ministry He achieved. Realise He did such for the likes of you and me!

5. The Shock Administered. (v15b)

The effects of this ministry will be astonishing. As the message of this One, the truth of who He is, what He suffered and all the glory that is His now, was told and realised, then even the mighty ones of Earth will be shocked, stunned into silence. The shutting of the mouths of kings because of Him, points us and tells us of their speechless astonishment. They cannot grasp or understand why this seemingly Disfigured One could achieve such a great thing, nor grasp of His present glory and how He is the Glorious One.

Kings will stand in silent awe of the Servant of God and this is a turnaround for the books! Servants usually stand silent before Kings, but as a result of His saving work, even the most important, bigoted and exalted man or woman will stand silently in awe and astonishment before the Servant of the Lord. These ones will be overwhelmed that this Glorious One would become the Disfigured One to sprinkle, purify not only their peoples, but them also!

They will be shocked as this message is proclaimed, administered - the last part of v15 speaks of this. There will come a point when these kings will be shocked and stunned into silence as they hear the message of the Servant of God - the Lord Jesus Christ.

The trouble is, many people may know something of God and Jesus, and yet put little value on Him, think so very little, if anything as to what the Bible and the gospel really and truly says. It is quite staggering to behold, see, to consider that God the Son should suffer as He did, so that the likes of us, as well as many, many others, could be clean, pure and right with God; that we could have a home in heaven and know God's love -

John 3:16 tells us this *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* It is incredible what we are told in Galatians 2:20 *“The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* Did we hear that - the Son of God, who loved **me** and gave Himself for **me**!

This is the message the Bible centres on, the message Paul was eager to preach, for he told the Roman church he wanted to do this everywhere - Romans 15:20 *“has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known,”* and then in the next verse He quotes part of Isaiah 52:15 (*from the Septuagint [LXX]*) *“Those who were not told about Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.”*

To have invented a way of salvation and such a message, a system like this seems incredible, it is too far-fetched, it would be blasphemous and yet this is the way of salvation God has provided for all who will ever believe in and on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. This salvation which He provided for men and women, young people, boys and girls, cost God the best He had in order that He could deliver, rescue us. It caused the Son of God awesome and indescribable suffering. Were we worth it? No one else would have thought so, but He did! That is why we are to centre our attention on Him, to learn who He really is and what He offers to do for us. If we are not a believer this morning, then behold what He did for us. If we are a believer, then we are to listen with joy to God the Father as He speaks of His Beloved Son, saying *“Behold My Servant”*!