

Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Theme: Three Qs.

We are used to people speaking of town or city centre events and places. We mean by it the hub of activity and what goes on there is usually of importance. That is why roadworks in the city centre often cause chaos, but celebration events usually mean people can get there easily. If you cycle, then you know that if you have a wheel out of line it will cause problems. No doubt we have seen “clown” bikes with the hub not central, looking so funny when ridden!

In this 4th Servant song in Isaiah, we have seen that it has 5 parts or stanzas, each part has 3 verses. We have looked at the first two parts and now we move on to the 3rd and central section which focuses our attention on what was really happening (v4-6). Here in these verses we are looking at this central and very important section which in the Hebrew poetry are the pivotal verses. In v1-3 we noted that the Servant was totally misunderstood because of His seeming insignificance. We noted last time:

1. The astonished expression at unbelief (v1);
2. The apparent reason for unbelief (v2);
3. The active evil of unbelief (v3);
4. The antidote presented for unbelief.

We saw this Servant was set as nothing, esteemed, valued at zero, as worthless, but v4-6 show us what was really happening. Let's note 3 things:

1. The Question - Anticipated and Answered.

Sadly, people through the ages, even we now can look at this Servant and see only a mutilated thing, a piece of meat or broken humanity suffering. We too can reject or neglect Him. With many there is still a pitiful misunderstanding and v1-3 can be true of them, even of someone listening to this message!

Yet here in v4-6 we have the true situation and the true facts of the case revealed to us. These verses are here to cause us to stop, to look again, to consider what really went on there on the cross of Calvary where the Lord Jesus, the Servant, died. These verses take us to the heart of what went on there on the cross. As they do so, they anticipate and answer the awesome question which the Lord Jesus cried out from the cross “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46)

The question the Lord Jesus asked, was not a why of doubt, or uncertainty. Remember He as God the Son knew why it had occurred. It was a question **to cause us** to ask of the why and wherefore of the cross; to think about, to seek out what really went on there and even why it had to be so!

That question from the cross of Calvary is anticipated and answered here in v4-6. If we are interested or want to know why that cry, why that dereliction, why the cross, the sufferings and all its shame, then we will find the answers here in these central verses of this 4th Servant Song. We will also find the answers and reasons for Him being in such an appalling form and so disfigured (52:14), the reasons why He is seen as unattractive, as nothing and is despised and rejected - for they are all answered here in these central verses.

2. The Quandary - We Were In.

A quandary is a difficult or perplexing situation - many people feel like that about this coronavirus pandemic. Some people get into situations and don't know what to do because they feel they'll go from the frying pan into the fire.

These verses shift our focus away from the Servant and our reaction to Him, to our own situation. There are 10 references to “us”, “we” and “our” in v4-6. Such ones have already been mentioned as those who are the critics and judges of the Servant (v2-3). Now the focus, the attention is turned onto the critics as they are presented with the facts of the matter. They are tested, tried and found wanting. It is they who are shown to be in a right old quandary!

The Bible teaches us of God’s absolute holiness - which we may think of in negative terms - “*He does not do... or isn’t...*” Yet the Bible, as it describes God as being holy, always views it as an awesomely positive thing, so much so that He is described as a burning, a consuming fire. This holiness of God is so destructive to anything less than itself e.g. a laser light and some different coloured balloons. If we were to point the laser at the balloons, some of them would burst instantly, but those balloons who were the same colour as the laser beam light would be unaffected. The laser would be destructive to that which is not the same as it. God’s holiness will tolerate nothing less or inferior to it. Mankind was made in that holiness - part of being made in the likeness of God. This meant God could walk and talk with them in the garden of Eden, for they were righteous and holy from the hand of the God who created them.

Yet that changed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they went their own way - in other words they sinned and fell short of God’s standards, likeness and glory. Ever since then there has been this bias, magnetic, gravitational attraction to independency from God and to do what we want. In v6a we have this emphasised - “*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;*” - ALL of us, everyone born of man and woman will go our own way and not God’s way. We are ALL rebels against God and

we want what we want, even if God says “*No*” - because He cares for us.

Sin has placed in us a self-centred will, to do what we want and we, because of this bias, will always choose sinful things. We know that we as people are not all as bad, vile or evil as we could be, but we all will go astray and not live as God would have us. We choose to be free of God’s restraints and do things our own way! Our quandary is that we cannot by self-effort or self-improvement do anything about this. We fail to realise we are on collision course with this God, His Holiness and His holy anger against such rebellious living.

Because we have these sin biased and affected lives, we have outworked in our lives things which establish us on collision course with this holy God. We have transgressions and iniquities (v5). **Transgression** indicates our standing regarding God and His law, for transgression is a breaking of the law of God. When we all go our own way, we all as individuals break the law of God and we do so wilfully, do so against the restraints of that law. This means that we are not only rebels, but guilty lawbreakers and therefore doubly guilty and doubly deserving God’s punishment.

The word ‘**iniquities**’ is a graphic word, meaning warped, twisted, perverted from that which is the true. Many years ago, some friends came to visit us and had had new Avon tyres put on the car and 2 of them had developed bulges - they were warped from the true. The Hebrew word for iniquity is “*avon*”! God has a right, a true standard and way of life for us, but we have gone off it and the life we live is warped, twisted, even perverted from the true. Sadly, in some people this is obvious to see, but in most others, this is not seen. Yet none of us live as we should before God or keep in line with His ways.

There are consequences for these in our lives - the symptoms of this sin biased life are infirmities, griefs, sorrows, sicknesses, illnesses whether caused by any virus or not, and ultimately death. Sin's consequences are not hidden away - every pain, every sickness, every death of a loved one, every disaster cries out the facts of the reality of sin, rebellion, transgressions and iniquity which affect this world, mankind and you and me.

Yet those are symptoms and are not the most serious effect of our going our own way, of transgression or of iniquity. We are ultimately on this collision course with this holy God, we are not at peace with Him, nor He with us. We will have to face Him in His holy anger and judgement. Then we will realise how helpless and hopeless we are. This is our quandary - we are unable to do anything to avoid, prevent or escape from this collision! How will we face that awesomely holy God on that day? Nothing we do, feel, or sacrifice can help. No tears, no feelings can prevent it. We are on this collision course and no man or woman can help us, because they too have gone astray. We are in a quandary and a quagmire of our own undoing. Left to ourselves we are helpless. That sounds like a really bad news, worse than the coronavirus pandemic. Thankfully there is good news...

3. The Quittance Made.

Before I am told that I have made up a word, the word quittance is a real word made from 2 words - quit and tance and it means "*a release or discharge from a debt or obligation, the acknowledgement of a payment*". We are the guilty ones, we have transgressions, iniquities, we have all gone our own way and we have this debt of guilt to God. We had the obligation to live as God wanted, but we did not. We were helpless. Yet the Servant

came to release us from that obligation, He came as the one who would pay fully and completely the debt we owe.

We should be forsaken by God and handed over to the punishment we deserve, yet the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary suffered all we deserve in our place. He swapped with us; was our substitute. Why was Jesus forsaken by His Father? You and I are reasons, my sin, your sin! This is shockingly amazing. So much so that Isaiah cries out “*Surely*” - a strong statement of a assertion and contrast; for He appeared despised and rejected, we hid our faces from Him, we esteemed Him not and counted Him as nothing, BUT there was absolutely nothing in Him that deserved such pain, suffering, such a mutilation of body and soul. Surely, He has borne, took up **our** infirmities and carried **our** sorrows; He was pierced for **our** transgressions and was crushed for **our** iniquities.

Nothing of what He went through and endured, especially in His trial and crucifixion, was as a result of any fault or failure in Him. He did not go His self-centred own way, He had no sin, no transgression, no iniquity. He went the way of the father perfectly. All He went through, especially on the cross, was caused by and was the result of you and me. Read these 3 verses with the first-person singular pronouns “I, me, my”, for that is what its impact is and should be! We despised Him, rejected Him, neglected Him, counted Him as nothing - for He appeared as nothing to us, a thing of horror and we had no time for Him as individuals; but He endured all that for us, for you and for me.

Every horror, every bit of suffering - His piercing, His pain, His being stricken by God, His being crushed, wounded are all because of who and what we are and have done. In the Hebrew v6 begins in a dramatic way - “*all of us*” and ends with “*all of us*”. All of us had gone astray like sheep and yet the Lord laid on the

Servant (Jesus) the iniquity of us all. Every one of our vile thoughts, every bit of our hatred, every lie, every bit of pride, every sexual sin and lustful thought, every blasphemy, every horror of anger, murder, cruelty, every sin, transgression and iniquity was laid on Him like a stinking blanket to crush His holy soul and person. If that was not bad enough, yet there was worse to come upon Him. What was worse than that? He was made sin - all that is unlike God's holiness, He, the holy Son of God, was made that. That in itself must have hurt and caused an agony. He had laid upon Himself all the iniquity of us all. The word laid means "to hit or strike violently" - not gently placed upon like a wedding veil, but to lay fierce blow upon blow on a savage dog or animal.

Yet additionally, with that on Him, as He is made sin, so the anger and wrath of God the holy Judge against our transgressions, our iniquities, our going astray is poured out in white-hot molten punishment upon Him. The terms used in these verses are fearsome - stricken, smitten, afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastised, punishment, wounds. Yes, we think and say crucifixion was a horrible and painful way to die, but Jesus died not only that death, but He died under the white-hot molten wrath and punishment of God that I deserve, you deserve for all eternity. It burst upon Him on the cross, because there He took all the punishment in our place for our sin to bring us peace with God.

He was our quittance, our surety. We owed a debt we could not pay, He paid the debt He did not owe and He paid it completely and totally for all whosoever will believe on Him. As Anne Ross Cousin wrote in a hymn "*Jehovah lifted up His rod: oh Christ, it fell on Thee, Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God; there's not one stroke for me. Thy tears, Thy blood beneath it flowed; Thy bruising healeth me.*" [Oh Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!]

Have you seen that? Have you recognised that the reason why the Father forsake His darling Son was you and me? If so, have you gone to the Lord Jesus in sorrow for your transgressions, your iniquities, your going astray? Have you owned them as real and deserving of guilt and punishment? Yet have you gone rejoicing because He offers to all who go to Him, but only to those who will go to Him, a complete pardon of all their transgressions, iniquities, sin and guilt - those which we have done, are doing and will do. Have we realised he will give us in place of that, the holiness of God and it will be ours forever? We are to realise that justification by faith, is a legal transaction, declaration and work of God and we can say gone my transgressions and now I am free, all because Jesus was wounded for me!

That is something of what these verses reveal to us in this can be ours for ever. Many of the old hymn writers loved to put such truths into song and they wanted to declare the eternal reality and security that is found in this wonderful truth e.g. Augustus Montague Toplady starts one of His hymns *“From whence this fear and unbelief? Hath not the Father put to grief His spotless Son for me? And will the righteous Judge of men condemn me for that debt of sin which, Lord, was charged on Thee?”*

What a privilege we have if we have trusted the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour. We once were sinners, but now there's been quittance, our debt has been paid, we have been pardoned and we are redeemed. The Lord Jesus is an amazing and lovely Saviour and I would encourage us all to trust Him, to love Him and get to know Him the better.