

Isaiah 53

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[0 : 00] Do turn in your Bible to Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53.

Samuel 53. Samuel 53. Samuel 54. Samuel 54. In the States they have to commemorate God's goodness in bringing their pilgrim fathers and allowing them to settle in the US.

There's this really strange tradition, isn't there? If you've seen the West Wing, you'll know about it. The presidential pardon of the Turkey. It's real. It happened last November 2.

No one's really quite sure where it came from. Some people blame President Truman. Some people go as far back as Abraham Lincoln. But every year on Thanksgiving, the President of America, the so-called most powerful man in the world, pardons a Turkey.

You can go onto the White House website. There are two turkeys. A couple of years ago, one was called Pumpkin and Pecan. There's names for the turkeys.

[1 : 20] Previous winners include Marshmallow and Yam, Biscuit and Gravy, Stars and Stripes. It's odd, isn't it? And there's a question where you can send in your question to the President.

What happens to the Turkey after it's been pardoned? Well, apparently for 15 years, the turkeys were sent to Kidwell Farm. Wait for it. Frying Pan Parade, Virginia.

The last couple of years, they've been sent to Disneyland. So instead of ending up on somebody's Thanksgiving dinner, these turkeys spend the rest of their lives in freedom.

Another question from the website. Once a turkey is pardoned, would eating it be considered a federal crime? He says, I need to check with the Attorney General. Bizarre, isn't it? Absolutely bizarre.

At the heart of Thanksgiving, there is, isn't there, a pardon for the most powerful man in the universe. At the heart of the Christian message, is a pardon for the most powerful man in the universe.

[2 : 21] And it's not for turkeys. It's for human beings. And that is the message of the gospel. The gospel. There is a pardon from Jesus, God's servant, our Savior.

And yes, he is the most powerful person in the universe. But you wouldn't know it, would you, from Isaiah 53. It doesn't look like it.

The message of Christianity, in many ways, Isaiah 53, boils down to its simplest form. That Jesus, God's servant, our Savior, died that you and I might live.

That's why Philip, in Acts 7, can tell that if you're a eunuch, that this servant who suffered and died in the most appalling circumstances, that this is good news. And it's good news when you understand what it's about.

Now, Isaiah 53 is a poem. It's a song in five verses. And it's written in 750 years before Jesus was born. And it's written in such a way, very carefully written, that you are to read it from the inside out in.

[3 : 35] The emphasis falls on the middle section in Isaiah 53. The middle section, that he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him. That is the middle section, verses 4 to 6.

And so the whole thing is constructed in a way that deliberately leads you to that point. God has the first word and the last word in the song. So if you look at chapter 52, verses 13 to 15, God introduces his servant.

He says, behold, look at my servant. He says, my servant will be raised and exalted and highly lifted up. That's the first verse in the song. And then we'll see the last verse in the song is chapter 53, verse 12.

Where God says, I will give him a place amongst the great. I will divide him a portion with the many. I will divide the spoil among the strong.

[4 : 40] I'll give him a place among the great ones, literally. So, as far as God is concerned, Jesus really is the most important and powerful person in the universe.

He is highly exalted. The highest place that heaven affords is his by sovereign right. And yet, in between the beginning of the song and the end of the song, we are shown something that seems to completely contradict that.

We're shown three things about the servant. Before we want to get into that, I want us just to notice the trailer for the film. The trailer is really verses 13 to 15, where God introduces his servant to us. And he gives us the main theme of the film. God shows us what the servant is going to do. And it's bewildering. Because it's contradictory. Look at verse 13. He is successful.

He is triumphant. He is highly exalted. But in verse 14, he is disfigured. He is disgraced. And he is mutilated.

[5 : 43] It's the same person. So, look what it says. God says, behold, my servant will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up.

And he will be exalted. But in verse 15, people are appalled at him. As many were astonished at him. Because his appearance is so mad.

He is so disfigured beyond human resemblance. He doesn't even look like a human being, according to verse 14. So, one minute, he's in the highest place of the universe.

But the next minute, he's at the point where he doesn't even look like a human being. Just a chunk of meat. So, you don't know, in verse 13 or 14, whether to be amazed or appalled.

You don't know whether to be delighted or disgusted at him. Can it be the same person? And so, God says, after introducing in his sermon, in verses 13 and 14, So he shall sprinkle many nations.

[6 : 44] And kings will shut their mouths because of him. Because what they were told, they see. And that which they've not heard, they understand. Kings will shut their mouths.

Royalty will be speechless. And many will be astonished. There's amazement at the servant king. There's a sense of shock at the servant king.

There's a sense of fear and a sense of joy. And you and I are so familiar with it. That it doesn't astonish us. It should shock us.

A.W. Tozer wrote in a radio broadcast. And his title was, Is the O Missing from Your Faith? If you go through a good old hymn book, and you go to the index, and you look at O, you will see that previous generations wrote lots and lots of hymns, beginning with O.

So think of some of the older songs. And can it be? And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood? Died he for me, who caused his pain, for me who him to death pursued.

[7 : 56] Amazing love. How can it be? That thou, my God, shouldst die for me. 'Tis mystery all. The immortal dies. Who can explain this strange design?

In vain the firstborn seraph, the angel tries, to summon the depths of God's. It's astonishing. They were not told about it, but they will see it. They've not heard about it, but they will understand it. And it's not something that you could have guessed. And God tells us two things that the servant's going to do. In this introduction, in this trailer, verse 13, he says that he will act wisely. It doesn't mean he's got a high IQ.

That's not the point. You can be very intelligent, can't you, and not be wise. But this says, my servant will act wisely. In other words, he will know what to do to bring about God's purpose.

Another translation says, my servant will prosper. In other words, he will succeed at what he's going to do. So you look at the life of Jesus, and when he's 12 years old, in the temple, he knows what he's doing.

[8 : 59] The little boy has got lost in the big city, and his mum and dad are frantic. But when they find him, he's there talking with the doctors of the law, in the temple. And they're cross, aren't they?

The parents are angry with him, and they're worried. And that comes out. Your mother and I were looking everywhere for you. What were you thinking? Do you remember what Jesus said? Didn't you know that I'd be about my father's business?

You mustn't think of Jesus as some kind of wide-eyed, innocent, abroad, a kind of evolutionary freak, who's not like the rest of us. Jesus knew what he was doing at 12 years old. He knew what he was about.

He knew he was about his father's business. He is the servant of the sovereign Lord, who's come to do his father's will, which is the sufferer to die. My servant will act wisely.

He will prosper. He will succeed in what I've asked him to do, God says. He knows what he's about. But what is it he's about? Look at verse 15. So he shall sprinkle many nations.

[10:01] Do you remember when we went back through the book of Leviticus, and the day of atonement, that's what the priests were to do. They were to take the blood of an animal, and they were to sprinkle that blood over everything.

Over the people, to make atonement for their sins, to declare that they were now right with God. Sprinkling is what the priests did. And why did God want the priests to take the blood of an animal and sprinkle it over everyone and everything?

Why? To teach the seriousness of sin, and the holiness of God. That you can't just breathe into the living God's presence as if nothing has happened.

God is holy, and we are sinners. And you see, not even Aaron, Israel's great high priest, not even Israel, God's chosen nation, can approach God in their own right.

The blood is going to be sprinkled. Someone's got to die. And the surprise, of course, is what the servant will do. In verse 15, the servant's blood, which is sprinkled, atones for not just the nation of Israel, but can you see it, for many nations.

[11:12] That's the surprise. That is the mystery that Paul calls in the New Testament. That this servant, who's going to shed his blood, is going to sprinkle many nations, Jew and Gentile, and reconcile many nations to God.

That's his job. One of the three things. First of all, let's see the reality of his suffering. Look at verse 1. Who has believed what he's heard from us?

It's unbelievable. And to whom is the arm of the Lord being revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It's unbelievable. Who's believed our message? What is that message? What we saw in Isaiah 50 last week, it is a message about great strength in great weakness.

God's strength in his servant's weakness. The arm of the Lord revealed in a tender shoot, a root out of dry ground. The arm of the Lord in verse 1 is a phrase that crops up, doesn't it, in the Old Testament again and again.

[12:36] So we're told that God rescued Egypt, Israel, out of Egypt with an outstretched arm. God did that. God rolled up his sleeves and stretched out his arm to rescue his people out of slavery from Egypt.

And again and again we find that phrase used to describe that event. The arm of the Lord has done that. His arm is not too short to save. The Lord rolled up his sleeves.

I've seen your plight, I've heard your cries and I have come down to deliver you. The arm of the Lord stands for his outstretched arm, his strength to rescue.

The arm of the Lord means his power to save his people. David Morgan was one of the leaders in the 1859 revival in Wales and David Morgan was a very boring preacher.

And people didn't like to listen to David Morgan. There were other preachers that they preferred to listen to because he was so dull. Anyway, he was new to preach at one of these great gatherings and just at the outbreak of the revival, someone introduced him and prayed for him and this is how they prayed.

[13:46] He said, Lord David Morgan, not much of a preacher, just a tattered old sleeve. Put your arm in him. It's a great prayer for a preacher. Just a tattered old sleeve.

It's not a designer label. Jesus, it's not even a designer label. What is he? He is a tattered old Galilean peasant homespun.

I mean, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Nazareth was even on the map. He is the illegitimate son of a Galilean peasant. Is this the son of a carpenter, they said?

Why should we listen to you? Who has believed our report? Who has believed our message that the arm of the Lord is going to be revealed in this tender shoot, this root out of dry ground?

You expect some kind of charismatic figure, some dynamic conqueror, some Alexander the Great, not some not particularly good looking Galilean peasant, that you wouldn't even cross the road for.

[14:53] You might think, we want someone like Israel's first king. Do you remember Saul who stood head and shoulders above the rest? Or King David who had this charismatic personality who was so good looking, who was so popular with the people?

No, this servant will be despised, verse 3, and rejected. It's no wonder Isaiah says, who's believed our report? They were expecting, weren't they, a dynamic deliverer?

They were expecting a mighty king and instead they got a tattered, ragged, empty sleeve of a man. Forget about the stained glass windows, forget about the images in the children's Bible, Jesus was not impressive to look at.

In fact, if Jesus walked past you in the street, you wouldn't pay the blindest bit of notice because he had no form or majesty that you should look at him.

He had no beauty that you would desire him. He was Mr. Average. And so how can it be that the one that God is going to use to save the world is like this?

[16:05] So why did God choose to do it this way? Well, let's secondly see the reason for his suffering. And this is the heart of the poem from verses 4 to 6.

And it is structured in such a way that all the emphasis lies here. Surely he has bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, and upon him the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed.

Oh, we like sheep have gone astray, we've turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. What does that imply?

It implies that we are not at peace with God, in fact we are at war with God. We are rebels against God. That's what sin really is.

The punishment that brings us peace with God was upon him. it should have been on us. Notice how he piles up the words here to describe our plight.

[17:10] The word transgression, it means a willful and a deliberate rejection of God's law. It's don't walk on the grass and you walk on the grass.

It's a crossing of the boundary. It's a deliberate and willful rejection of God's moral law. And God says you shall not commit adultery and we say I don't care what God is going to say.

It makes me feel good. You shall not lie but it doesn't matter what God says. Everyone lies. That is transgression. It's crossing the boundary that God has set.

And the word iniquity is a different word. It comes from the word to bend or to twist. And it reflects that there's a pervertedness about human nature. That it's not just what I do is the problem.

It's what I am. I am not a sinner because I sin. That may sound complicated but it's very very important to get hold of.

[18:10] I am not a sinner. You are not a sinner because you sin. You sin and I sin because I am a sinner.

And so my problem is not just the things I do or that I don't do. My problem is what I am. And amazingly Jesus pays for that. He pays for what I do yes but he pays for what I am.

He became sin for us. He who knew no sin became sin. So just as on the day of atonement the sin of the people do remember it when we looked at Leviticus it was laid on the goat and the goat was led into the wilderness so Jesus takes the sins of his people upon himself and he carries them away.

He was delivered up for our offenses Paul says in Romans not his own he hadn't committed any offenses but he was delivered up for our offenses and raised for our justification.

George Bernard Shaw once heard this message the same message I'm preaching to you this morning and he heard the message of the cross and the substitutionary atonement of Jesus and he was so offended by it as many people are.

[19:27] He got up in the middle of the sermon and he stormed out of the room and he said as he left the church he shouted out I'll pay for my own sins thank you very much. And that's what proud human beings want to do.

We don't want to be in anybody's debt. Kingsley Amis gave an interview to the Telegraph in the last week of his life he wasn't a Christian and this is what he said. He said one of the great advantages of Christianity is that it offers an explanation for sin.

I haven't got an explanation for sin. Christianity has got one enormous thing right. Original sin. But one of the benefits of organized religion according to Kingsley Amis is that you can be forgiven your

sin.

Which must be a wonderful thing he said in the last week of his life. And then he paused apparently for a very long time in the interview and he bowed his head very low and said I carry my own sins around with me.

There is nobody around to forgive them. How terrifying that is in the last week of your life. I carry my own sins around with me.

[20 : 36] There is no one to forgive them. But there is. But there is. There is someone there to forgive them.

Who is he? Well he's the most powerful man in the universe. There is forgiveness. There is pardon from the chief executive officer of the universe and there is a pardon from Jesus.

Why? How is it possible that because this man who is indeed highly exalted in the highest place in the universe, this man has been to the depths and he's taken your sin upon himself, he's paid the price.

Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon his shoulders. The word for it is substitution. It's at the heart of the Christian message.

Substitution is not difficult to understand. It really isn't. Mothers say to their children, or at least they do when I grew up, go and get some milk from me. What does that mean?

[21 : 45] You be my substitute. You go down to the shops instead of me and you get the milk instead of me. And Jesus went down into the depths of humiliation.

He took upon himself the curse of God because of sin so that you did not have to go there. Bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place, condemned he stood.

Those funny programs, you know the airport things where someone sees there's something weird about a passport. passport. It was a valid passport but the photo didn't quite fit so they send it off to the lab and they find out that somebody has put their own photo on someone else's passport and that is fraud.

There's a sense in which that is the message of the cross. That is what Jesus has done but it's not fraud for him to do that. Jesus has substituted his identity for ours so that you and I can get into the kingdom.

It's not fraud, it's perfectly valid because Jesus is what you and I are supposed to be. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the one you were meant to be like but you haven't been that person.

[23 : 07] He came and lived the life that you should have lived but you've not lived it. And he died the death that we deserve so that you don't have to die that way.

He has substituted his identity onto our passport so that you can get into the kingdom of heaven. He was made sin for us, he who knew no sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Substitution, it's not difficult, is it? You're playing football and somebody's having a lousy game and so the manager pulls you off and he sends on a substitute.

And so that's precisely what I want you to do this morning. If you want to know how to become a Christian, then listen carefully. You are playing a lousy game and you know where your life is going and you know that you need a substitute.

And you know that you are bound to lose if you carry on playing in that way. And the Bible tells us that God has provided a substitute for you.

[24 : 22] A substitute who can come and take your place so that there may be victory instead of pathetic failure. So that you can get up on the podium at the end and get your medal. Not that you deserve it. not that you earned it.

You've played a lousy game but he is your substitute. And so will you call on that substitute if you've never done that before? To call on the Lord Jesus to be your substitute.

To admit your life is going nowhere really in the end. And I need you to come on the field and be my substitute and a standing for me.

thirdly the reward of his suffering. Verses 7 to 12. What does Jesus get for his pains? What is his reward for his sufferings?

Because at first it doesn't look very good. Verse 7. He is deprived of justice. Can you see that? Just again notice the words. He is oppressed, afflicted, led like a lamb to the slaughter.

[25 : 23] He is deprived of justice. He is deprived of descendants. verse 8. As for his generation who considered that he was cut off from the land of the living.

He struck down in the prime of life. He doesn't have a secret life in France like Dan Brown says. He doesn't have descendants. He was a single man. He chose to be a single man.

It was a choice that he made. It wasn't easy for him. You were single here this morning. You need to understand that Jesus understands the pressure that you are under. as single people.

He chose to be a single person without children. Even though everything in him as a human being would have wanted to have a family. He chose to go that way. He had no children. He had no descendants. He was struck down in the prime of life.

He wasn't even buried in the family vault. Look at verse 9. And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death. And I used to think that's why it all turns.

[26 : 21] That's the good part. He gets a comfortable grave to lie in. Things are going better.

Joseph Bartheolmea. He comes up with this tomb and it's wonderful but it's not. Because when you read the book of Isaiah, what do you find out about the rich?

You find out that the rich were corrupt. And the point is this. For a Jew, you see, it was so important to be put in a family vault. To be gathered to your own people. Don't you see that all the way through Genesis?

But Jesus wasn't even gathered to his family in death. he was strung up like a common criminal.

And he was put in a rich man's tomb. It's the ultimate humiliation. For the servant to be buried with the rich, it's like a final insult.

God's servant doesn't do what they do. He's not like them, but he gets buried with them. And even after he has died, he's counted amongst the wicked and the corrupt. Crucified between two thieves. Buried with the rich. And if we were to stop there, you get depressed. We'd give up. We would say, wouldn't we, Jesus is a heroic failure. A loser.

[27 : 29] But the final word belongs to God, and that's why we're here this morning. Look at verse 10. Three little letters. Yet. Yet.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush it. be Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He was put into grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied.

By his knowledge shall the righteous one My servant make many to be accounted righteous And he will bear their iniquities Belsa Mandela spent 27 years in prison Suffering locked away by a racist regime Do you remember when he was released from prison?

It was an amazing thing wasn't it? He was released from prison Walking out of Robben Highland And then within a matter of months it seemed He was the president of South Africa He went from being powerless And dishonoured and disgraced and defeated And he went from rock bottom to scale the heights And became a world statesman That's what Jesus has done in a more profound way And far reaching way than Mandela He hit rock bottom He was despised and rejected Scorned and mocked and beaten and killed And yet now he is risen and ascended And exalted at God's right hand And look at verse 10 The will of the Lord will prosper in his hand That is today That's 2000 years after the crucifixion The will of the Lord will prosper in his hand That's what he's doing this morning He is sitting at God's right hand And his will is prospering 53,000 people will become Christians today

[29 : 39] Somewhere in the world Only 3,000 people became Christians on the day of Pentecost We don't see that do we We don't see very much of that But we need to pray that that will change But the will of the Lord is prospering in his hands What is the will of the Lord?

It's to sprinkle many nations The word many It crops up again and again In verse 11 and 12 He will make many to be accounted righteous He will justify many Verse 12 He bore the sin of many What is his reward?

He was a childless man Cut off in the prime of his life What is his reward? It's more people than you can number Many people, many nations He doesn't have a family He dies childless And yet his descendants Just as God promised Abraham Are more than sand on the seashore And as he looks at his church today He loves it And he delights Behold I and the children you have given me And as he looks at you and I And this vast family around the world This vast growing family The church And as the gospel is preached throughout the world His heart is filled with delight and love Because

Jesus died for our sins and rose again And he's up there with the great ones Who says that? They're probably not your friend at work They ask you what you're doing You said you went to church And they look at you And you've got three hands He's a footnote to history Isn't he? According to our world They don't rate him But God does And his resurrection Is his vindication Do you remember at the day of Pentecost? Peter said this man that you took And you slew And you crucified him That was your verdict You throw him on the slag heap of history You thought you got rid of him But God has raised him from the dead And made him Lord And so today You have to think again Don't you?

[32 : 04] God's verdict On the crucified Suffering servant Well he raised him from the dead And he served notice On the entire human race Of the final verdict That on that last day Every knee will bow to him And every tongue will confess That Jesus Christ is Lord So this is the one Who was deeply humiliated But is now highly exalted And to this day Verse 12 He is dividing him A portion with the many And he's seeing Of the travail of his soul And he is satisfied There is forgiveness of sins For what you have done There is forgiveness of sins For your guilty conscience There is forgiveness of sins For the skeletons in your cupboard From the most powerful man in the universe Who purchased it At such cost for himself And there is forgiveness A presidential pardon Not for turkeys But for you and I sinners Won't you take it? Let's sing Let's sing