

“He has Carried our Sorrows”

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Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

God Presents His Astonishing Servant

¹³ Look, my servant will prosper; [*Is 42:1*]

he will be raised and lifted up

and highly exalted. [*Is 6:1; Phi 2:6-11*]

¹⁴ Just as many were appalled to see him – [*Wis 5:2*]

his appearance was so disfigured, unlike any man,

and his form, unlike any human –

¹⁵ so he will astonish many nations,

and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

For what was never told to them, that they will behold,

and what they've never heard of, that they will ponder.

Believing the Message – Seeing Yahweh's Action

53:¹ Who has believed what we have reported?

And to whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?

² He grew up before him like a tender shoot,

and like a root out of parched earth.

The Servant Appeared Despicable

He had no form, no majesty.

We looked at his appearance and did not desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by people, [*Ps 22:6-7; 88:8*]

a man who suffered and knew pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces

he was despised, and we thought him worthless.

He Seemed Punished by God, but He Suffered for Us

⁴ But surely he has borne our pains

and carried our sorrows, [*Mt 8:17*]

yet we ourselves considered him smitten,

struck down by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, [*Ps 69:26*]

he was crushed for our iniquities;

on him was punishment for the sake of our peace,

and by his wounds we are healed. [*1Pt 2:24*]

We have Done Wrong; Yahweh Laid Our Sins on Him

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, [*Wis 5:6*]

each of us has turned to our own way;

and Yahweh has laid on him

the iniquity of us all.

He Suffered without Outcry or Complaint

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,

yet he did not open his mouth; [*1Pt 2:23*]

he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, [*Jn 1:29*]

and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,

so he did not open his mouth. [*Act 8:32-33*]

Though Innocent, He was Killed for the People's Wrongs

⁸ By oppressive judgment he was swept away.

And of his future, who will even think of it?

For he was cut off from the land of the living;

from my people's wrongdoing

the fatal blow struck him.

⁹ He set his grave among the wicked,

and with the rich oppressor in his death,

though he treated no one with violence,

nor was any deceit in his mouth. [*1Pt 2:22*]

Because this was God's Will, there is Hope

¹⁰ Yet Yahweh delighted to crush him with weakness.

If you make his life an offering for sin,

he will see offspring and prolong his days,

and Yahweh's delight will thrive in his hand.

¹¹ From his soul's anguish, he will see light;

he will be satisfied by his knowledge.

God Confirms His Servant

The righteous one, my servant

will make many righteous,

and their iniquities he himself will bear.

¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among those many,

and with the strong he will divide the gains of struggle,

because he bared his life to suffer death,

and was numbered with the transgressors.

And he himself bore the sin of many, [*1Cor 15:3*]

and became advocate for those transgressors.

Acts 8:27-35

²⁷ And Philip rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." [Isa 53:7-8]

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Isaiah 51:9-10

⁹ Awake, awake, put on strength, Arm of Yahweh! ... Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?

¹⁰ Was it not you who dried up the sea, ... who made ... a way for the redeemed to pass over?

A Vision Planted in the Heart of God's Story

This text in Isaiah is one of the most important in history. But it is filled with mysteries. The Ethiopian in Acts 8 shows the challenge. Great scholars like W. Brueggemann point to its difficulty. As Christians with help of Acts we hear it as a direct prediction/description of Jesus.

A text nearly 600 yrs old when Jesus lives. People puzzled. Who are the people in the poem? God, "Arm of Yahweh," the "many," "nations," "kings." "The Servant" – is that Israel as in Is 49:3? Or a person turning Israel back to God as in 49:5? Then "we!" Who are "we"? Israel? Those who have seen the Servant but misperceived him and now have realized a greater reality about him? Us today, now reading this text? We recognize ourselves in the "sheep gone astray"!

The Servant is in the midst of this swirl. As we see him, he is with the sinful many, bearing their sorrows and sins. He embodies God's will and delight; he is the "Arm of Yahweh." He is the one whom people see but do not see, hear but do not hear. Till he astonishes us by transforming us! He is God's people but also the appalling/exalted sign for all nations. Israel and humanity. The vision uses both future verbs and past tense verbs. Is it describing past or predicting future?

Jesus and the Servant of the Lord

I imagine when Jesus as a boy read this text for the first or 100th time. In the Servant, Yahweh, the "Arm," the suffering, the transforming love, the mystery, Jesus saw the Father he knew, whom he embodied, the one eternal God. This was being known by God. The vision of who God is.

The Servant is God visiting his People, rejected, loving, redeeming. The Servant is an event – God intervening for us. What happens is profoundly unjust, transformed into grace and delight. What happens is God! Deeply mysterious, captured by the "we" who realize how wrong we are.

The Servant takes on himself every kind of human brokenness. He is disfigured, lacks beauty, despised, rejected, treated with contempt. He takes on sickness, pain, sorrow. He is pierced and crushed, oppressed, afflicted, punished, wounded, slaughtered, cut off from life, buried.

But the suffering itself is not the whole point. As God's Servant he takes these sufferings not as just punishment, but although he has done no wrong. He takes them as our transgressions, our bent character; he bears our sins; his whole life becomes an offering that brings us peace/Shalom.

We see ourselves and our sin more clearly through Him. We minimize our sin. But the suffering of the Servant shows us the seriousness of our brokenness. God's people are like all people, sinners.

The deep character of our sin is in our self-will – we turn to our own way. Self-will is one of the most highly valued characteristics of our modern society. We want to be the master of our own lives, our own gods. Jesus becomes that Servant/Yahweh. He gives up his life in order that we can regain ours, know Peace, Salvation. "Our God Reigns" – reigns in our lives to give his life!