



A MESSAGE TO BE BELIEVED

A study of Isaiah 52:5 – 53:12

Looking deep into the message written hundreds of years before Christ to confirm our need to believe in the one who came as the Suffering Servant.

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Part 1

After spending several months listening to the words of Jesus from the book of John, I found, as Easter drew near, I was especially drawn to a passage from the book of Isaiah. Who was this man, who could speak so deeply into my soul? God explains through the prophet, almost eight hundred years prior to the arrival of Christ, just what kind of Savior we were to expect and who we now know and have.

The arrival of this Servant-King is to be announced to the world, but just as Isaiah came to know, not all would believe or accept. The lack of acceptance by the masses does not make the message any less important or truthful. I will start this new Focus Friday session in the middle of the fifty-second chapter of Isaiah and continue through the end of the fifty-third, as it helps us to get the full picture of the one we call Lord.

“And now what do I have here?” declares the Lord. “For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock,” declares the Lord. “And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed. Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I.”

Isaiah 52:5-6 (NIV)

Oh, how this sounds so much like our present-day reality. Life was bad for the people of Judah, but it was nothing like what Isaiah was telling them was coming. The surrounding pagan nations would attack, invade, and carry off God's people into exile. Could anyone see anything good coming from the prophet's message?

What is worse than having the name of your God mocked and blasphemed? Little did their enemies know that God had allowed this to happen. God's hand of protection had been removed from his people because they too had blasphemed his name through the worship of idols.

What must it be like for God to hear his name blasphemed *all day long*? We certainly live in a day where that is happening, and not just outside the church.

However, as God tells his people—a day is coming when those who know my name will realize that I had foretold not only this disaster but their salvation as well.

As for many today, the day is dark, yet salvation is at hand, but not in the way they expect it. For the Christian, we know what it is to say, "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming!"

Pray for those who blaspheme your God today. The message we've heard and accepted is for us to share with them as well.

Part 2

I have to dwell on this verse today from Isaiah 52, because it holds great sentimental value to me. When my late husband and I prepared to leave for overseas service, my father and mother read this verse to us as they planted a small dogwood tree in their backyard.

For the next twenty years, we watched that dogwood grow from a small scrap of a tree into a full-grown beauty. We measured our years away by the growth of that tree. This is the verse they read:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

Isaiah 52:7

In the midst of the darkness of pending exile, there was a message to which they could hold—the message of the coming Savior, the Servant-King. No matter what lay ahead, in terms of trials and trouble, they had good news to share.

Those who overcame their circumstances to proclaim the message were said to have beautiful feet. Do you find that odd? It's not surprising, but it does have a history. In the story of King David, as he was awaiting news from the battlefield, a

runner would be sent to carry the news to the leader. To be a swift runner would indicate a clear victory, good news. Therefore, those who have beautiful feet on the mountains are those who are eager to bring the good news of the Savior to a lost and dying world.

I'm not sure how beautiful our feet were, but Raouf and I were definitely eager to move overseas and share the good news of Jesus with the nations. That message, as the Lord says through Isaiah, is one of peace, good tidings, salvation, and the declaration that God reigns overall.

I can give testimony to how this message affects those who are struggling and lost in their hopeless estate. There is a distinct change in a person's face and even body language when the peace of Christ moves into their heart and mind. Peace beyond all understanding is indescribably life changing.

The message of Christ is also good because it's the message of salvation.

There is nothing as good as knowing death no longer has a hold on you and sin has been defeated for eternity. So, so good is the salvation of the Lord. "Taste and see that the Lord is good," the psalmist says (Psalm 34:8).

In a land where enemy kings were invading and occupying, in lands today where the good of

citizens is an afterthought of most in power, the messenger brings the news that God reigns! The Lord who reigns over all is not like the rulers of this age:

He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us...The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

Psalm 103:9-12, 19

No wonder the runner runs as fast as possible to share such news, such wonderful news with the hurting and dying. It's great news, and time is of the essence to share it.

Who, around you today, needs this message of good news? Run, run swiftly, and share it with them before it's too late. Today may be their day of salvation.

Part 3

The Lord continues his message through the prophet Isaiah to a troubled people:

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:8-10

This prophecy has been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. In the midst of an occupied city, and occupied nation, the Messiah came. Remember how they welcomed him into the city that last time?

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

John 12:13

Hosanna means “God saves.” What could be more joyful than the reality of his salvation. In the coming of Christ, God did comfort and redeem his people, and countless peoples among the nations have seen his salvation as well.

But that's not the complete fulfillment of the prophecy.

Many times, in the Bible, a prophecy will have an immediate fulfillment, a future fulfillment, and even an ultimate fulfillment. If we look at this passage from Isaiah, we know that God did restore and save his people from exile. They struggled for seventy years of captivity, but he did return to rebuild their wall and eventually see their temple restored (though not to its former glory).

As I said, through Jesus's time on earth, his death, burial, and resurrection, this is fulfilled in a fuller way. Though trials remain, there is joy in the salvation God brings.

Finally, this passage carries the message of the complete fulfillment of God's salvation. With the return of Christ a second time, the Lord's holy arm will be laid bare in the sight of all nations, because his judgement will be carried out. At that time, every eye will see, every knee will bow, and every mouth confess that Jesus is Lord. His return will be seen by all peoples, and those who know him will have such joy and relief, while those who have rejected him will be crushed and bitter.

Whether you are seeking God or already know him, this is a message to be believed and heeded. Christ has come once to make the way possible for many

to join him on his ultimate return as Savior and Judge. Even today, the watchmen are on the lookout for the runners who bring the good news. The way is being made for that glorious day.

Listen! He's coming again.

Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus.

Part 4

As Isaiah shares the prophecy of the coming King, these words would be often repeated by coming generations as a reminder of God's redemption. Some would catch glimpses, others not, and even in our modern day, these passages are read for encouragement and comfort.

God is calling his backslidden people back to himself:

Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the LORD's house. But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

Isaiah 52:11-12

As we near the verses on Christ himself, our hearts must be prepared, just as those who were going out to share this good news were required to be purified while carrying the articles of the Lord. Only in relationship with Christ and thus filled with his Spirit, will we be able to grasp the depth and meaning of the message to be believed.

The good news for those in Isaiah's time, and for us today, is that God goes before us and hems us in. He protects his people and protects his message.

Think about that.

With all the messages the world spews forth today, there is ONE message that has lasted the millennia and remained true—the message of Christ our Redeemer.

It's obvious then why there is no reason to rush or escape in fear; we can stand firm in the message of Christ. His words are solid rock, and we can build our lives on them in complete confidence.

Do you realize that when you share the good news of Jesus, God is preparing the way before you? He's also got your back! That message is the article we hold in our hands and share with the world. It's no wonder we need to keep our hearts and minds pure. When we have a clear conscience before Christ by keeping our slate clean in confession of sins, we are the best messengers for his name.

As we move forward in this passage, prepare your heart and mind for God to reveal Christ in an even deeper way, both for you to believe and share with others.

This message to be believed is for sharing!

Part 5

Though we must be careful to keep ourselves clean and pure to be able to proclaim the good news to the world, God now provides through the prophet Isaiah a picture of the coming Messiah. Unlike Israel, whom God chose as his people to serve and be a light to the nations, this Suffering Servant does not disappoint, turn to idols, or in any way deviate from the will of the Father.

We will take this passage by bits, so as to delve deeply into his character and work.

The last three verses of Isaiah 52, begin our look into the One who comes:

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Isaiah 52:13-15

I love how he begins with the word *see*. He's telling the Israelites to look. The salvation that the ends of

the earth will see is coming in the form of a servant, but not just any servant (because the people of Israel were supposed to be servants too); no, this servant will act wisely. He won't be swayed by the ways of the world. He will be sure and steadfast in the work the Lord has prepared for him.

He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. This shows the final exaltation of Christ, not just post-resurrection, but upon the second coming. That's why God compares it with how people saw him during the first time he was raised and lifted up, but not exalted, because he was raised up on a cross—the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world.

At that time, many looked at him and were appalled with his appearance. Those who knew him would not have recognized him, so disfigured and marred he was from the lashes, the beatings, and the crown of thorns. At the cross, his blood surely sprinkled those in close proximity, as he hung in agony, but in the second coming, when he is raised, lifted up, and highly exalted, not just a few, but many nations and rulers will marvel and be left with nothing to say in defense of their own unbelief.

The truth of the mystery of the gospel will be made known to all at his coming—Christ in you, the hope of glory. Those who heard and believed will rejoice;

those who heard and refused the message will have nothing to say for themselves.

Do you believe on the One who suffered in your place? If so, you know the truth of the mystery revealed, if not, do not delay—Jesus is coming again soon.

Part 6

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Isaiah 53:1-3

This suffering servant, whom people found so appalling in appearance; this one who would shut the mouths of kings and sprinkle many nations—who can believe such a message?

How could this be the one to rescue God's people?

The Lord continues his message through the prophet Isaiah by going back to the beginnings of the One to come, for even that held no special distinction:

- He grew up like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground. Jesus would be born into the humblest of homes, not to mention that Mary gave birth to him in something even

lower—a stable, a place worthy only of animals, not men. His earthly parents had nothing to offer him in way of wealth or privilege. He was born into the dry ground of a mere carpenter, who would eke out a living with his craft.

Who could believe the Messiah, the Savior, would come from such a place in society? From Nazareth, even?

- He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him; he didn't stand out with his physical looks. If Jesus walked this earth today, could we pick him out from a crowd? Were people drawn to him in his day because of his looks? Hardly. Only when he started performing miracles and teaching with authority did others take notice of him. Thirty years he lived among the people of Nazareth, travelled with his parents to Jerusalem for feasts—thirty years, and no one knew or saw in him anything special.

Who could believe such a common-looking person could be the Sent One?

- Instead, he was despised and rejected by men. He knew suffering and pain. Even with the miracles, people turned against him. When Jesus spoke of his flesh as the bread

of life and that his blood would be drunk by those who believed, many of his own disciples stopped following him. What pain this must have brought him to know that he had come to his own, but they did not receive him. Ultimately, the pain he knew while standing before the crowds, those who had earlier shouted, "Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord," now shouting "Crucify him!"

Who could believe in one who had been rejected by so many, who allowed himself to be led to the cross without a word in defiance?

- People hid their faces from him then, and people hide their faces from him now. He was despised then, as he is now. His name is taken in vain and cursed.

If this is the supposed Savior, how can anyone believe that God would allow him to take such abuse, scorn, and shame?

"Man of Sorrows," what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

Man of Sorrows: Lyrics and Music by Philip Paul Bliss (1838-1876)

Part 7

In our earlier section of Isaiah’s prophecy, we looked at a man who seemed so opposite to what the world would expect for a savior. Born in the humblest of circumstances, without beauty or majesty, despised not esteemed—how could we believe such a one would rescue and save?

Now, as we read the following verses in the fifty-third chapter, I find myself reflecting on why the station of his birth, his looks, and worldly insignificance were just so. It would take such a man, a man who was already familiar with the pain that comes from being a refugee, a child of poverty, and even a dreaded “Nazarene” to handle the even greater pain to come. Think on that, as you read these words:

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:4-6

I'm struck with the fact that it was not only the world's rejection of my Savior, but that of his own people who turned their noses up at the suffering he bore. Yes, the punishment he received would have been viewed as inflicted by God. Who would believe the Savior, Messiah would endure such shame?

Those who understood the prophecies of years past.

- He was pierced for our transgressions.
- He was crushed for our iniquities.
- The punishment he received brought us peace.
- His wounds brought us healing.

I believe this message because I know how much like that wayward sheep I've been. I know how undeserving of God's love I should be.

I know that I'm no wooly-white sheep, but more like a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Even so, for me Christ died, taking on himself my sin, my shame.

Do you believe the message? Believe it and you'll know the peace it brings—and the price he paid to secure it.

Part 8

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Isaiah 53:7-9

Silence in slaughter.

Left with no defense.

Cut off from the living.

Punished for someone else's sin.

Destined for the grave of the wicked.

Rewarded with the grave of the rich.

No violence, no deceit.

The ultimate injustice.

This is the Suffering Servant. This is our Lord and Savior.

Will you believe the message? He who faced a farce of a trial, the beatings we deserved, went through it all in silence and determination for you, for me—that we might live.

Part 9

It may be difficult enough to believe that the savior of the world would be oppressed, rejected, cut off, and killed for our transgressions, but now the prophet Isaiah makes clear that it was the Lord's will for this to happen? How can this be?

Let's read verse ten in Isaiah 53:

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

Isaiah 53:10

These are hard words. It's hard to believe our salvation required such violence against an innocent man, and yet, this is the truth.

From the moment man sinned in the Garden of Eden, sacrifice was required. The first time that blood was shed was a result of Adam and Eve's transgression. The Lord himself, who had earlier enjoyed time in this earthly paradise with his creation, now would banish them from his presence. An animal was killed to provide the garments of skin to cover the symbol of their shame—nakedness.

Yet, that was all it did—provide a temporary covering not an eternal one. That shame was much greater and required a guilt offering that could only be met by a sacrifice worthy of the task. Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of Man, he alone was pure and holy enough to be that sacrifice.

A brutal murder yielded only a temporary death because God would raise him up to life again in victory over the eternal death we deserved.

No earthly offspring would he have, but spiritual, eternal children, birthed through the new birth that comes by faith in the One who gave his all. Spiritual children and prolonged days, eternity-long days, would be the result of Christ's obedience.

The Lord's will would be accomplished, prosper, in the hand of Jesus.

What looks so horrible, what was so horrible, brought us life, not just for today, but for the life to come. Can you believe that message? I pray you do, as it is the difference between life and death. May you accept the guilt offering of Christ today. His sacrifice removes our stain.

Part 10

Have you believed the message yet? Today is our last look at this passage from the prophet Isaiah. The man whose words we heard in the gospels was revealed in such depth almost eight hundred years before Mary heard his first cry. Don't delay trusting in the truth of this life-changing Word.

After all the suffering of this servant of God, today we will glimpse its purpose and fulfillment.

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:11-12

Have you ever seen a person who hangs on to suffering? They give their all (just short of death) for another person or their children, but when it's not acknowledged or appreciated, they go through it all again. It's like it never accomplishes anything.

Not so with Jesus. Yes, he suffered, anguished, as other translations use. It's a deep, agonizing suffering that led to death. We know, as horrible as his physical suffering was on our behalf, it was nothing in comparison to the spiritual suffering he endured by being separated from Father God at that moment when the sins of the world were laid on his shoulders.

He endured it all—once for all.

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

1 Peter 3:18a

I can imagine that Peter was thinking of Isaiah's prophecy when he wrote those words under the inspiration of the same Spirit. Isaiah tells us, again eight hundred years earlier, that after the suffering was endured, "he will see the light of life and be satisfied."

I don't crucify Christ, as some would say, every time I sin. No, he died once to cover my sins, past, present, and future. Past, at the moment I confessed my need for a savior, present, when I ask for his forgiveness in the moment, and future, because his blood was enough to cover whatever wrongdoing lies ahead.

Jesus satisfies my debt and yours too, and he recognized that when he said the words on the cross, "It is finished." He had accomplished that for which he came, and once done, he would again see the light and be able to offer justification to all who believed.

Ultimately, the Suffering Servant has defeated death and gained the victory; and though in his death, he was numbered among the transgressors, in life, he now makes intercession for them and offers salvation they could never have known without his sacrifice.

The arm of the Lord has been revealed to you today through this message that is good news for all mankind. Yes, God allowed and even willed his Son to die, but not without purpose and confidence in a sure victory over sin and death. Now, because Christ has fulfilled the Father's plan, we too can know victory over sin and death in our own lives.

That's a great message to believe and share!

A Message Worth Believing

In this time, we have poured into a passage written 800 years before Christ's birth, and yet, it could have easily been written by one of his disciples or the apostle Paul after having lived with him and seen his effect on the world in which they lived.

But they didn't write it, Isaiah did, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it is that single fact that tells us, who live on this side of history, that it is worth believing.

Read through the entire passage once again today, to take in the whole of this wonder of the Word that points us to The Word who was from the beginning with God and was God—Jesus, the Christ.

*“And now what do I have here?” declares the Lord.
“For my people have been taken away for nothing,
and those who rule them mock,” declares the Lord.
“And all day long my name is constantly
blasphemed. Therefore my people will know my
name; therefore in that day they will know that it is
I who foretold it. Yes, it is I.”*

*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of
those who bring good news, who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”*

Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the Lord's house. But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

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He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong

his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

This is our Savior. Believe this message about him—believe in him and be saved.

Grace and Peace

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