



Isaiah 53:1-3

The Divine Sufferer

The Song of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

[The Divine Servant \(52:13-15\)](#)

The Divine Sufferer (53:1-3)

[The Divine Substitute \(53:4-6\)](#)

[The Divine Sacrifice \(53:7-9\)](#)

[The Divine Satisfaction \(53:10-12\)](#)

We have arrived at the "golden passion" of the Old Testament.

The inhuman suffering of the Servant of the LORD and His high exaltation causes utter amazement to all who hear the message. The strongest emotion is the unexpressed emotion. The people and the rulers are caught in unexpressed emotion of extreme amazement and the people tremble and the kings are struck dumb!

Can you imagine anything that could have such consequences on mankind?

In the later part of Isaiah fifty-two, we saw the broad sweeping strokes of the suffering of the Servant of Yahweh (52:13-15). The Hebrew prophet has saved the grim details of suffering for this chapter. It is filled with pathos and horror. "The wages of sin is death." In deed, the "message" is so horrifying that the response to it is "Who in the world has believed our report?" The message seemed so incomprehensible that no one would believe it when they heard it. The implied answer to the question is "Not I! No one."

The Astonishment to the Message of the Divine Sufferer (53:1)

The truth that is communicated here is beyond anything in the Old Testament and has never been voiced before this passage. That is why this message is so startling to the people. The prophet under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit communicates revelation from God about the Suffering Servant.

Who has believed our message?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Isaiah expresses dismay at the response of the people to the announcement of the extreme humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah. It reminds us of Isaiah 6:9 and the hardness of the hearts of his listeners. Nothing much will have changed by the time of the coming of the Servant centuries later.

This verse reminds us of the response of a Jewish rabbi when he spoke of the

This verse reminds us of the response of a Jewish rabbi when he spoke of the same message. "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer" at Paul in Athens. "He was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" in Corinth (Acts 18:4). Paul devoted himself completely to "testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah" (v. 5). "And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles'" (v. 6). That is not an isolated instance of the rejection of the message of the humiliation and exaltation of the Servant of Yahweh. Even Paul had to be wrestled to the ground before he would surrender to Christ (Acts 9).

The message

The "message" is the "thing heard," the "tidings," i.e., the message of the prophet. That which caused the kings to become dumbfounded was what they had not heard. When the truth came out, they couldn't say a word (52:15). The message was the exaltation of the Servant of Yahweh from a deep state of awful humiliation.

God as we shall see accomplishes it by His strong "arm."

The apostle John tells us Isaiah was referring to Christ when he said these words "because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him" (John 12:41). In a context where John tells us Jesus was teaching about His coming death and resurrection he quotes Isaiah 53:1 reminding his readers of the hostility and rejection of the Servant. They rejected the report or message of Christ. He "departed and hid Himself from them" (12:36). He reminds them, "That the words of Isaiah might be fulfilled" (v. 38). Then John quotes Isaiah 6:10 which tells of this hardening of the heart.

No one will believe the report of the strong "arm of the LORD" accomplishing redemption for His people through a Suffering Servant.

The apostle Paul quotes verse one in the context of issuing an invitation to believe on Christ for salvation in Romans 10:16. If you do not believe the report you cannot be saved. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (v. 17).

The report was the prophetic announcement of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ that caught them by surprise. They were over-powered by the message.

Who is the speaker in Isaiah 53:1? Is it the kings in (52:15), or the Israelites speaking in retrospect, the prophet, or the people Jews and Gentiles articulating a confession through the prophet, or the Jewish remnant lamenting the fact that so few will believe?

In John's Gospel the question is introduced, "Lord, who has believed our report?" It was addressed to God. In this case, the prophet was the one asking the question (John 12:38).

John R. Sampey said correctly, "The New Testament application of this great prophecy to Jesus is not an accommodation of words originally spoken of Israel as a nation, but a recognition of the fact that the prophet painted in advance a portrait of which Jesus Christ is the original."

The Gospel writers relate amazingly similar reactions to the blindness of the religious leaders and the people in Jerusalem to the crucifixion of the Servant of the Lord. The arm of the Lord was at work in the events on the Cross. The people were in total disbelief that the Servant of the LORD would suffer and die. "Who would have believed what we just heard?" (NET). Note the plural "we" suggesting the prophet is speaking as representative of the sinful nation. The group acknowledges their their sin and recognizes what the suffering Servant has accomplished on tier behalf.

Luke 24:19-24 sounds like Isaiah. Jesus was walking along the road to Emaus listening to the conversation between two of His disciples. They were in disbelief about the reports that Jesus was alive. In response He asked, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see" (Luke 24:19-24, NASB95).

Then Jesus said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory? Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:25-27, NASB95).

What would be the reception of Jesus Christ if He walked into our synagogues or churches today? How would His message be received if He were to come to our town and villages in which we live? Would things have really changed? Who has believed our report? "

"To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"

"Arm of the LORD" is a metaphor of military power. The listeners refused to believe the omnipotent power of the LORD to accomplish His eternal purpose of redemption of Israel through the Servant. The Suffering Servant did not demonstrate His sovereign power in a military defeat over the enemies of Israel.

God's arm upon a person is His omnipotent power. When you believe the message it is evident that the Lord's power has been manifested. This is true when we believe the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to save us (Romans 10:9-17). Only God is able to save. It is His power in action to save us who believe on Christ. Cf. Isaiah 40:10-11; 48:14; 51:5; 63:5.

Unless God demonstrates His saving power we can never be saved. A spiritual birth must take place to accomplish our salvation. No one can ever be saved unless God is at work deep in his inner being to bring about spiritual birth. He does it through the message of His Word. That is Paul's argument in Romans chapter ten.

Can God accomplish what He sets out to do? Who will believe the message of His mighty redemption? Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. That is God's omnipotent power at work to save a lost world.

The "arm of the LORD" is the omnipotence to work redemption in Israel. God is not an amputee, as some would have us believe our day. The "arm of the LORD" is a person –the Lord Jesus Christ. He has executed God's eternal purpose. The arm of the Lord is revealed in its grandest operation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. From the throne of God He rules the universe. When He returns at His Second Coming we will see the manifestation of the strong arm of the Lord in all of its power and glory (Philippians 2:8-11).

The Attitudes toward the Divine Sufferer (52:2)

For he grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
No appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

The Hebrew prophet tells the life of the Servant from the cradle to the grave. The "arm of Yahweh" will be manifested in the whole course of His life. The growing up as a tender shoot out of dry ground is the revelation of the great power of a sovereign God.

The lowly origin of the Servant (v. 2)

The vivid picture in the mind of Isaiah is so clear that he declares it as already having taken place. But he is not speaking of an individual who has already lived or someone in his own day, but a future event.

"He grew up before Him" refers to the coming of the Servant upon the earth. He is not describing someone who will appear on the scene in the splendor of glory of the messiah. There was nothing about His appearance that would attract a massive following. However, He was precious in the sight of God. He did everything with the idea of pleasing His Father (John 5:19-20). He lived His life in the power of God and in conformity to His will. He had God's attention. No person, other than the Lord Jesus Christ, has ever lived every minute of his life under the complete control of the Spirit of God. He was under the ever-watchful eye of God.

The prophet describes adverse conditions. "He sprouted up like a twig before God, like a root out of parched soil" (NET). The "parched soil" suggests insignificance and humility. One of Jesus' own contemporaries asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

The people saw the Servant as a mere "suckling," or a "tender shoot" or twig that grows out of an old dead stump. Farmers cut off tender sucklings and cast them aside. It is a general statement of the humility of the Servant and rejection by the people.

Is this an illusion of Isaiah 11:1? Suckers can grow up to become giant trees. Does Isaiah have in mind the fallen dynasty of David? There is a close connection between Messiah ben David and the Suffering Servant. Even the disciples of Jesus had trouble accepting the idea of the latter. The Suffering Servant is the Messiah himself, the Savior-King. He is the servant the dynasty of David waited for down through the centuries. He is the humble servant king.

He is like "a root out of parched ground" (v. 2b). Why, they looked at the Servant and decided there was nothing promising in Him. The dry ground could refer the humble, lowly conditions of his peasant background. He came from miserable conditions of poverty, a lowly Nazarene. A root in a dry parched

background. He came from miserable conditions of poverty, a lowly Nazarene. A root in a dry parched ground would have a struggle to survive. The people would not compare Him to the tall cedars of Lebanon. He was a lowly birth and living in the Galilee of the Gentiles. There is no form of glory that men would boast in Him. The attitude of the people was such that they could find no beauty that they should desire Him. They drew their conclusion based on outward appearances rather than the righteous character of His heart.

Moreover, by the time Christ appeared in Israel, the ax of divine judgment had fallen upon Judah and nothing was left but stumps standing. There was an insignificant stump in Israel in the house of David. It had become so insignificant and unimportant that it is called "Jesse" in 11:1. The name of David had fallen to the level of which it stood when David's father bore the honor of the name of the family, long before David's glory. Nothing was left of that name by the time Christ came but just a tender shoot in hot, desert arid soil. It was a spiritually dry land when Jesus arrived in Israel. The glory has long departed from the family name.

The Servant dwelt among His own people and they refused to believe in Him (John 1:10-11). The invisible Word became visible and they rejected it. They refused God's Messenger and His message. He didn't look and sound like royalty.

The sad commentary of the people is found in the following words in our poem:

He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

The people completely misjudge Him. They rejected Him based on wrong perceptions. No one considered Him worthy. No one stood up and claimed to be His friend or colleague. How many came forward and defended Him at His trials before Pilate and Herod?

The Bible doesn't say anything about the physical appearance of Christ; therefore, we should concentrate on His spiritual qualities. He was completely like His Father and they refused to accept the righteousness of God (John 5:17-43). His holy character was an indictment.

The Lord Jesus Christ is still unattractive to the unregenerate natural man. He is no conquering hero, powerful political leader, or silver-tongued orator. Here was no self-made saint.

Keil and Delitzsch translate, "We saw Him and there was nothing in His appearance to make us desire him, or feel attracted by Him." He was repulsive and contemptible to them.

When it came push to shove they stood outside Pilate's house and shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" "Not this man, but Barabbas!" The estimation of the world is still the same. Men do not fall at His feet and worship Him until they have had a radical change of heart that comes through a spiritual birth. "Unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The cross of Jesus Christ is always a scandal to the unregenerate man.

The reason for the response of the people (v. 3)

He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,
And like one from whom men hide their face,
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

- *"despised"*

The nation of Israel despised and rejected the divine Servant. The word "despised" which is used twice in this verse has the idea of "ceasing, lacking," like the "one who takes the last place." It is like being treated with contempt. Have you ever been the last one to be chosen on the baseball, football or soccer team? They all rejected Him. They put Him at the end of the line.

"Pilate's scornfully wondering question: Art *Thou* –such a poor-looking creature –the King of the Jews?" observes Alexander Maclaren.

When we look at the life of Christ we see Him despised and rejected of men. Luke 18:31-33 is a good example of what happened. Here are the words of Jesus when He took the twelve disciples aside and said to them:

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered up to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day he will rise again.

Like Isaiah's listeners, they could not handle the information. "They did not comprehend the things that were said" (v. 34). The disciples refused to believe it. The human mind listens only to what it wants to hear. There are none so deaf as those who refuse to hear, so blind as those who refuse to see. The message was mind-boggling. It was beyond belief.

- *"forsaken of men"*

They kept back away from Him. It is the idea of leaving one in a lurch without help in time of need. They withdrew from Him. The image of lepers in the Old Testament who were kept separated from the populace and made to cry out, "Unclean!" The "better class of men" forsook the Servant. He was rejected, boycotted or shunned by men of rank.

The name of Jesus is either the most loved and cherished name among men, or the most despised and hated.

- *"man of sorrows"*

He was "a man weighed down by sorrow" of heart in all its forms (Keil). His entire life was filled with "constant painful endurance" because He grieved over the sinful condition of His people. He saw their unbelief and wept over it. He wore the pain and sorrow of humanity. The pain and sickness may be identified with His vicarious suffering for our redemption. Here was the most misunderstood man on the face of the earth.

- *"acquainted with grief" or "sickness"*

He was acquainted with sin "sickness." The word for "sickness" here stands for sin. It reminds us of Isaiah 1:5-6,

Where will you be stricken again,
As you continue in your rebellion?
The whole head is sick,
And the whole heart is faint.

And the whole heart is faint.
From the sole of the foot even to the head
There is nothing sound in it,
Only bruises, welts, and raw wounds,
Not pressed out or bandaged,
Nor softened with oil.

Grief was His constant companion. It was not because He was a sickly person. Isaiah is describing the effects of the wrath of God against sin. Sin burned like a raging hot fever in His holy soul.

- ***"Like one from whom men hide their face"***

This was the reaction of men to the Servant. They found Him so revolting to look at because of the griefs and sickness that characterized Him. They turned their faces from Him as if He had some repulsive disease that distorted His face and made it impossible to look at Him. The people pulled their cloaks up over their eyes to hide His countenance from them. They were sickened and repelled by the sight of His agony on the cross. They were so disgusted by His awful bloody appearance that men turned their faces from the cruel scene. The scene was so repulsive they "hid their faces." It is like when you see something so horrible and repulsive that you turn your face away to keep from seeing it.

However, it was more than physical suffering of the crucifixion. It was the holiness and righteousness of seeing an innocent sufferer hanging on the cross dying for their sins. He was the innocent substitute dying for the guilty. They couldn't bear it. Just as the message stopped the mouths of the kings, so they could not bear to look of the innocent sufferer bearing their guilt.

- ***"He was despised and we did not esteem Him"***

Martin Luther correctly translated, "We estimated Him at nothing." We counted Him a zero. We didn't give Him a second thought. That is how much we valued Him.

Read the words of this stanza again substituting the pronouns that refer to the Suffering Servant with the precious name of Jesus.

Who has believed our message?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
For *Jesus* grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
Jesus has no *stately* form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
Jesus was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
Jesus was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Have things really changed? It is one thing to give complimentary words to Jesus as a prophet or a good religious teacher, but it is entirely something else to bow and worship Him. The horrible truth is we are vile, depraved sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. We deserve everlasting punishment separated from a holy God. Isaiah pictures before us in amazing detail the death of the Lamb of God as a vicarious substitutionary sacrifice dying in our place on the cross. The suffering servant of God satisfied the justice of

substitutionary sacrifice dying in our place on the cross. The suffering servant of God satisfied the justice of God and reconciled sinful man with a holy God.

We live in a day when sophisticated society rejects the suffering servant. He is despised and rejected, and men count Him as nothing.

On the other hand, I get excited and thrilled at the response to millions around the world who put their faith in Christ as a result of watching the *Jesus* film or who hear the presentation of the good news of Jesus' death for their sins. For some who read this it is unbelievable that reasonable people would put their faith in a crucified savior. For others it is absolutely revolutionary. The stigma and scandal of the cross will always be there. "For the word (*the thing preached, the message*) of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24, *Italics mine*). The "natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (2:14).

Our reaction is exactly the same as in the days of Isaiah and Paul. We rebel toward the message and the Messenger until the Holy Spirit breaks in upon our spiritually dead hearts and convicts us of our unbelief and the reality of the cross and the resurrection of Christ. Under the "strong arm of the LORD" our hearts are softened and we are born from above spiritually. Only then will we trust in Him alone for the gift of salvation and eternal life. Respond to the uneasy feeling of conviction in your heart right now. That is God's Spirit at work convicting you of sin and your need of Christ. Then trust in Christ as your personal Savior.

If you already know Christ as your personal Savior take these verses and fill your heart in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD God for so great salvation.

It is almost frightening that many never see the revealed power of God. The arm is revealed, but only those who have believed the report actually see it. Only those who believe in Him receive the benefits of His death and resurrection. The next time He raises His arm it will be in judgment against all of refuse to submit to Him. Please, before it is too late, put your faith in Him today.

Go to [The Divine Substitute \(53:4-6\)](#)

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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