

The Astonishing Servant of Jehovah (Isaiah 53)

Now for this morning, I finally want you to open your Bible to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 53. And we are about to embark on a study of this immensely important portion of the Old Testament as we begin our series in the Old Testament, finding Christ there. The reality this morning is, folks, I give you sort of fair warning. The reality is you're going to think you're in an upper division class in the Master's Seminary, because it is essential for me to give you the groundwork and the foundation and something of the structure of this section of Holy Scripture.

You need to understand its character, its context so that you can be able to draw all the richness that is in this chapter. I have heard sermons on Isaiah 53, but you're going to get more than that. You're going to get a series that could last as long as a couple of months. And in order to make that all that it should be and for you to be able to see what is really in this incredible section of Scripture, I'm going to have to give you an introductory message this morning. And so you need to put on your scholastic cap and think carefully and thoughtfully about this, expect to be on overload a little bit.

We're going to test your gigabyte capacity this morning, how much you can handle. But we're going to lay this one down on CD, if you will, or on MP3 file for the future. It'll be the kind of thing you'll probably want to go back to and listen and absorb in the future. As we come to Isaiah chapter 53, I have to say that the beginning of the passage is really in chapter 52, verse 13. So when I make reference, in general, to a study of Isaiah 53, I'm actually including 52 verse 13 through 53 verse 12, that entire section of 15 verses, starting in 52:13. It all belongs as one. I could only wish that when the scholars had labeled chapter 53, they'd actually started it at verse 13 because verse 13 sets up what is detailed in the fifty-third chapter.

Now if you've been a Christian for any time at all, you're very familiar with this section of Holy Scripture, and you should be. It has been called by some scholars in the past, "The Fifth Gospel." The Fifth Gospel, to be added to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It was Augustine who said way back in the fifth century, "It is not a prophecy, it is a gospel." It was Polycarp, the student and friend of the apostle John who called this section of Scripture "The Golden Passional of the Old Testament.

Martin Luther himself said, "Every Christian ought to be able to repeat it by heart." So, that is going to be your assignment, to memorize [Isaiah 52:13](#) through 53:12. And you will draw on it the rest of your life. It is very likely that you already know most of it if you have been a student of Scripture for any length of time. A couple of German scholars writing in 1866 said, "It looks as if it had been written beneath the cross of Golgotha. They further said, "Many an Israelite has had it melt the crust of his heart." The same German scholars went on to say this, "This chapter is the most central, the deepest and the loftiest thing that Old Testament prophecy outstripping itself has ever achieved," end quote.

You're going to find in this section of Holy Scripture the root of Christian thinking, even though it is Old Testament. You're going to find here phraseology that has entered and remained in Christian speech and conversation. You're going to find in this section of Scripture the text that has been used by more gospel preachers and writers through history than any other portion of the Old Testament. In fact, Isaiah 53 is the heart of Hebrew writing. It is the epoch messianic, prophetic Scripture that stands above all others in the Old Testament.

Now the luster of this prophetic gem is intensified by its setting. So get your Bible handy because you're going to have to grasp this with me. I want to give you the sense of what we're dealing with here, starting with a bit of a wider panorama. Isaiah is divided into two sections, chapters 1 through 39, and chapter 40 through verse 66. Obviously a long and very detailed and magnificent Old Testament book. It was written about 680 B.C. or seven hundred years before Christ. The first half of the book, chapters 1 through 39, speak of coming judgment and captivity, thirty-nine chapters where God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, speaking of judgment, judgment on Israel to come immediately. And it did come.

It came less than a hundred years after it was written in the beginning of the Babylonian Captivity when the whole southern kingdom of Judah, the only part that remained, the northern kingdom already had gone into captivity some years earlier, 720. The captivity of the southern kingdom is the target of the first 39 chapters. And beyond that, there are warnings about divine judgment on sinners of all ages and

all time, and even indications of a final, terminal, eschatological day of great judgment. But the chapters 1 through 39 are about judgment and captivity in terms of the Babylonian captivity and the greater issue of judgment on sinners and even the greater issue of final judgment at the end of human history.

So that chapter 39 ends with a pronouncement of the judgment that's going to come on Israel in the Babylonian captivity, when they will be taken away by the powers of Babylon. Listen to verses 6 and 7, "The days are coming – " verse 6 of chapter 39 — "when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon. 'Nothing will be left,' says the Lord, 'and some of your sons who will issue from you whom you will beget will be taken away and they will become officials in the palace of the King of Babylon.'" This is a specific prophecy about the Babylonian captivity which began in 603 about 80 years after Isaiah wrote it. He prophesied that it would happen, it did happen, there were three deportations, 603, 597 and 586 the final one and they didn't return until 70 years after that final captivity. So the first section can be verified as divinely authored because history proved its fulfillment to the letter.

That brings you to the second section. Twenty-seven chapters remain, chapters 40 through 66. The theme of the second section is grace and salvation, grace and salvation. These 27 chapters, starting in chapter 40, are the most sublime and rich portion of Old Testament prophecy. It really is a single prophecy, one glorious vision, one majestic revelation of salvation through the coming Messiah. It is sublime. It is sweeping. It is comprehensive. It encompasses not only the deliverance of Israel from Babylon, not only the deliverance of sinners from sin, but the deliverance of the nations from the curse into the Kingdom of Messiah. So it has those same elements. The first part talks about judgment on Israel, it talks about judgment on sinners, and it talks about final judgment. The second half talks about deliverance for Israel, deliverance for sinners, and a final deliverance into the Messianic Kingdom.

Most interestingly the second half, which is what we're going to be looking at, 40 to 66, begins where the New Testament begins. I want you to look at chapter 40 for just a brief moment and the parallel is quite interesting. In chapter 40 we read, "Comfort, O comfort My people, says your God." And that's the turn in the book of Isaiah from the pronouncement of judgment in the first 39 to comfort in the back half because of grace and salvation. "Speak kindly to Jerusalem." And then comes the prophecy in verse 3 of John the Baptist. "A voice is calling, clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness, make smooth in the desert a highway for our God."

And, of course, it was John the Baptist who came, who was the fulfillment of that prophecy, he was the forerunner of Messiah, he was the voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make in the desert a highway for our God." So, that's where the New Testament begins. The New Testament begins with John the Baptist. And that's where the back half of Isaiah begins. And so this so-called gospel section of Isaiah begins where the actual New Testament gospel begins. Now this section of Isaiah ends where the New Testament ends as well. And that is another remarkable feature in the 65th chapter of Isaiah. As you're getting to the very end, in verse 17 we read this, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth." The new heavens and the new earth, chapter 65 verse 17.

Then in the final chapter, chapter 66 verse 22, almost at the very end, "For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me, declares the Lord," and so forth. Guess where the New Testament ends? It ends in Revelation 21 and 22 with the new heavens and the new earth. So this section of Isaiah begins where the New Testament begins, with the arrival of John the Baptist. It ends where the New Testament ends, with the new heaven and the new earth. And thus we see the magnificent way in which this incredible prophecy parallels the New Testament. And all of it is written 700 years before Messiah comes to begin to fulfill it.

Now, who is going to bring this grace and salvation? Who is going to be the one to provide this deliverance? The answer is the servant of the Lord, the servant of the Lord. That is how He is designated. The Hebrew word is *ebed* and it means slave or servant. It's used many hundreds of times in the Old Testament. It is the Hebrew word for slave as well as servant. The Slave of Jehovah, the Servant of Jehovah, He is the one who will bring salvation. He is the one who will bring comfort. He is the one who will bring the forgiveness of sins. He becomes then the theme of this final section of the book of Isaiah.

Now let's go to chapter 53 for a moment, with just that kind of broad picture. And you will find in verse 13 of 52, "Behold My servant, Behold My servant," My *ebed*, My slave. This is the same designation that has been indicated much earlier in this section of the book of Isaiah. This is the fourth of specific

prophecies of the servant. Chapter 42 is one, chapter 49 is another, and chapter 50 verses 4 to 11 is the third. This is the fourth of what we would call Isaiah's servant songs, or servant prophecies.

Now in this presentation of the servant before us, the prophet calls on us to look at this servant and be astonished. If I were to title this message, I would entitle it, "The Astonishing Servant of Jehovah." I don't know what they put in the Grace Today but I would entitle it, "The Astonishing Servant of Jehovah." This is the most complete, most powerful, most important revelation of the Messiah in the entire Old Testament, right here in front of us.

Now a little more background on this. If you go back to Samuel, let's say, you sort of begin to have the revelation of God coming through prophets. Moses was a prophet, in a sense. He did give divine prophecy. He did predict even the Messiah, a prophet who would come. He identified Him. But really the prophetic office as we know it begins with Samuel. Others, of course, spoke for God, and that would be a prophetic ministry. But the prophetic office sort of begins with Samuel. That's about a thousand B.C., so 300 years say before Isaiah.

And the prophets were regularly told that there would be an age when God would rule and reign in Israel and from Israel over the world. Okay, that's just basic. There would be an age when God would reign and rule from Israel over the world. This, of course, had connections to the promises to Abraham and to David, as you well know. God would reign and rule in Israel over the world...and here's the key...through a righteous king, through a righteous king called in the Abrahamic Covenant the seed, and in the Davidic Covenant, the Son of David, a righteous King. This King would deliver Israel from its enemies, as we saw in Zachariah's Benedictus. This King would deliver Israel from its sins. So it would be a temporal deliverance, and more importantly a spiritual deliverance.

Since the promises of the Seed and the King and the righteous King who would come and bring salvation and bring deliverance for Israel and through Israel for the world, the hopes of the Jews had been high. They wanted that King. They looked for that King. And, of course, you can go all the way back into the era of Samuel and you will remember that they wanted a king. And so they chose a king by the name of Saul. They put their hopes in Saul, and maybe they actually assumed that Saul would be that one king who would come and bring salvation and make Israel the gem of the world and reign from Israel over the whole world, and bring a Kingdom of Righteousness and Peace.

Saul, however, was rejected, he was rejected by God for his gross intrusion into the priestly function, his overreaching and overstepping his bounds. He was a sinful man. And not only was he rejected, but his line was cut off from ever reigning again in Israel. Hopes then shifted to David. But David had his own problems. And David was such a sinful man and such a bloody man, that God didn't even allow David to be the one to build the temple. You remember David said to Nathan, the prophet, "I'm going to build the temple." And Nathan said, "Go for it, do it." And God came to Nathan at night and said, "Why did you tell him that? You didn't ask Me, I don't want him to build that. He's a man of blood."

David had his issues and David was sinful and David wasn't going to be that righteous King. But the promise came in Second Samuel Seven that it would be a son of David and hopes must have set immediately on Solomon. And it must have looked really good when Solomon came along because he enlarged the Kingdom vastly, and he became the wealthiest person in the world by a large margin. And not only that, because at the sort of beginning of his reign he asked for wisdom, God gave him abundant wisdom and so he was able to be successful in everything he did.

But it turned out that Solomon was a total tragedy. Solomon had his heart turned away from God because he married so many wives and had so many concubines; he was engaging himself in physical relationships with hundreds of women. He was a very debauched man. He was not going to be the righteous king. By the time you come to the end of his kingdom, the whole kingdom splits in pieces and the northern kingdom goes away. And every king after that in the northern kingdom is wretched and corrupt and vile and wicked. There's not one good one. And the southern kingdom struggles to survive with a long list of mostly corrupt kings and a few decent ones sprinkled in.

People were beginning to lose hope in the human king, even out of the loins of David. In fact, the line of David was so bad that at one point, one of David's descendants by the name of Manasseh became king. You probably remember King Manasseh. Let me give you the post-mortem on Manasseh, and this is all you need to know. [Second Chronicles 33:9](#), "Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel." A son of David led

Israel to do more evil than the Canaanites had done whom Israel displaced, and the Canaanites were a vile, idolatrous, pagan people. That's how bad it got.

All the kings in the north are corrupt. Virtually, the kings in the south are corrupt with a few exceptions. They all fail to fulfill the possibilities of being a righteous king. They're all failures at one degree or another. There were a few noble kings in the south, as you know. But no human king seemed to be capable to fulfill this anticipated promise. In fact, Isaiah's life comes to an end during the reign of Manasseh. Isaiah's life comes to an end during the reign of Manasseh when Manasseh has Isaiah sawn in half with a wooden saw. And that's what tradition tells us, and it's consistent with [Hebrews 11:36](#) and [37](#) which refers to Old Testament heroes being sawn in half. That was Isaiah.

How bad was it? No human king was a hope. It is just before Isaiah is sawn in half, just at the time of Manasseh taking over, Isaiah actually prophesied during the reign of four kings. If I remember right, Ahaziah, Joram, Ahaz, Hezekiah...Ahaziah, Joram, Ahaz, Hezekiah. You remember "In the year Uzziah died I saw the Lord," chapter 6, and those other three. And it was his prophesying during those years that is recorded in his prophecy. But it was when Manasseh came in, as best we can tell historically, that he was sawn in half in about 686 B.C., and probably wrote Isaiah just prior to that. So he wrote this prophecy of hope and grace and salvation at a moment in the history of Judah which was as dark as any moment had ever been.

They had Manasseh as a king and they were going into captivity. It couldn't get any worse than that. Their temple would be destroyed, their capital would be destroyed, the northern kingdom was gone permanently never to return, and they were next. In a time when the line of David was the most corrupt and the most vile and the most wicked, God steps in and gives to Isaiah a dramatic new revelation about the righteous King, a dramatic new revelation about the righteous King. If ever there was a time in their history they needed it, it was then, right? When all hope was gone. I mean, they were gone, they were leaving. It was over. And it was a bloody massacre when the Babylonians came.

And here was the news, the shocking news, the astonishing news. He would not be only a reigning King. He would be a suffering Slave. He would not only be a reigning King, he would be a suffering Slave, and His glory would not come until He had suffered. And further, He would not suffer for any evil that He had done because He would be a righteous king, but rather He would suffer for the evil that others had done. He would suffer vicariously. This is a new revelation. The righteous King would suffer. The righteous King would die. But He would not die for His own sin, He would die for the sins of the people. He would die in paying the penalty for the sins of His people. He would be a substitute who died in His peoples' place. And though that reality is pictured in the animal sacrifice system, right, it's pictured there, it wasn't until this prophecy that it was made clear.

Now let's meet this suffering Servant. Let me read, starting in verse 13. "Behold, My Servant will prosper. He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at You, so His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle, or startle, many nations. "Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him, for what had not been told them, they will see. And what they had not heard, they will understand. Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 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, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

"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. Surely our griefs He Himself bore. And our sorrows He carried. Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgression. He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our wellbeing fell on Him and by His scourging we are healed.

"All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way. But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He didn't open His mouth. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away, and as for His generation, who consider that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of My people to whom the stroke was due. His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief.

"If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied. By His knowledge, the righteous One, My Servant will justify many as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot Him a portion with the great and He will divide the booty with the strong because He poured out Himself to death and was numbered with the transgressors, yet He Himself bore the sins of many and interceded for the transgressors."

Do you see Christ there? Proof that God is the author of Scripture and Jesus its fulfillment is found in that one chapter alone, in the minute essential details exactly fulfilled in the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, intercession, coronation and salvation provided through Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself, the apostles of the New Testament, the writers of the New Testament in proclaiming the gospel point back to Isaiah 53 many, many times. Jesus referred to it. The apostles referred to it. The New Testament writers referred to it again and again and again. There are references to Isaiah 53 in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1 John.

No Old Testament Scripture so often and so convincingly is applied to Jesus Christ by the New Testament as this one. The New Testament writers refer to virtually every verse in the fifty-third chapter. It contains the sum and substance of the gospel, and to reject Christ is to reject the clear testimony of history, fulfilling every detail in this prophecy. But, on a bigger scale than the history and the fulfillment, as vital and important and wonderful as it is, is this question: what does that mean to me? That's the big issue.

You could be in awe of the history. You could be amazed that detailed prophecies concerning a person's life and death and resurrection could be predicted 700 years before the person arrived, and you should be. You could be in awe of the fact that no man could know that and therefore Scripture is authored by the only one who knows the future and that's God, who not only knows it but determines it. You should be in awe of the divine nature of Holy Scripture, you should be. But that's not where you want to stop, because there's a bigger, grander question than that. What does it mean to you? What does it mean to me and everybody else?

So let me talk about that for a minute. The truth of this ancient prophecy and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ answers the most crucial, essential, critical question that can ever be asked by any human being. I'm going to pile up the adjectives on you. This passage answers the most significant question any person can ask, the primary question, the principle question, the most vital question, the most weighty question, the most serious question, the most monumental question, the most meaningful question, the paramount question. And that has nothing to do with health, nothing to do with wealth, nothing to do with success, education, morality, wellbeing, philosophy, sociology, politics. The most important question that any human being will ever ask and have answered has nothing to do with the issues that occupy people's minds.

I suppose if you could Google on your computer, "What are the most asked questions?" you would go through thousands of them before you would ever, ever, if you ever did discover the appearance of this question. But it should be first. It is the most necessary question; it is the most essential question; it is the most determinative question, and it is, frankly, the most avoided question. It transcends all other questions infinitely, infinitely and yet it is almost non-existent on people's priority list.

What is the question? Here is the question. How can a sinner be right with God so as to escape hell and enter heaven? That's the most important question. How can a sinner be right with God so as to escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven? That's the question. How can a man be made right with God? How can a holy God declare a sinner righteous? That's the question. This is the great moral dilemma that exists in the world. This is the great moral dilemma that exists in the world. Listen, it is precisely to answer that question that the Bible was written. Did you get that? It is precisely to answer that question that the Bible was written. It is precisely to answer that question that Isaiah 53 was written. That is *the* question.

In the New Testament era there were millions of slaves and there was an awful lot of abuse of slaves. The numbers are sometimes astronomical. Some say 15 million slaves; some say 60 million slaves. People would assume, people who are socially sensitive, that the New Testament probably should have taken on the issue of human trafficking, human slavery, 'cause they had their sex slaves, as you well know if you know anything about ancient history. And they had all the abuses of slavery.

But it fascinates me that the apostle Paul, who writes thirteen books of the twenty-seven in the New Testament, the apostle Paul never wrote about the social injustices of slavery. What he did do was write a massive treatise on how a sinner can be right with God and escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven, and it's called the book of Romans. Isaiah 53 is the Romans of the Old Testament. Romans is the greatest New Testament revelation answering that question. Everything else in the New Testament also is part of the answer to that question, of course. But Romans pulls it all together and focuses specifically on answering the question. And Isaiah 53 is the greatest Old Testament revelation on the same question.

And both Isaiah and Paul, by the way, give the same answer. They both give the same answer. A sinner...here it is... can be right with God and escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven because the Servant of Jehovah became a substitute and suffered the judgment of God in the sinner's place. That's the message of Romans, and that's the message of Isaiah. God spent His wrath toward sinners on the Servant substitute. Now this is the heart of the section from 40 to 66, I'm going to show you how interesting just this little aspect of it is.

There are 27 chapters. Take my word for it; 40 to 66, that's 27 chapters. They're divided into three sections, 9, 9 and 9 in terms of subject, terms of subject. The first section ends with this statement: "There is no peace to the wicked." The second nine ends with this statement: "There is no peace to the wicked." The third section ends, chapter 66 verse 24, with a similar judgment statement. Each of the three sections ends with a warning of judgment on the wicked. But all three sections promise salvation. They're very evangelistic. They promise salvation and they end with a warning if you reject it. All three feature blessing and peace to the righteous and no peace and judgment to the wicked. All three determine that righteousness and wickedness is fixed forever. Destiny is not to be altered.

Section one talks about salvation from the Babylonian captivity. Section two talks about salvation from sin. And section three, the last nine, salvation from the cursed earth. So the first has to do with the deliverance of Israel from Babylon. The middle one, as I said a lot earlier, has to do with the deliverance of sinners from sin. And the third one, the deliverance of the earth from the curse, the glorious coming Kingdom of Messiah.

So the middle one is the one we're in. The middle section that we're in runs from 49 to 57. And this middle one is the issue of forgiveness of sins, and it asks the question about salvation from sin. Not temporal deliverance from Babylon, and not the eschatological Kingdom to come in the future, but deliverance from sin. Now that poses a very important question. Don't miss this; this would be worth waiting for. Why does God need to save His people from their sins? This is huge. This is huge.

And this was the issue with the Jews. They were not convinced that they needed, listen, a savior. They thought they just needed a righteous King. They thought that by virtue of their Abrahamic descent, by virtue of the Covenants and the promises and all of that, that they were in the place of blessing by virtue of their goodness and their religiosity, by virtue of their efforts at religious activities, ceremonies, rituals, attempts to obey the Law of God, they had earned their favor with God so they had it by race and they had it by merit.

So this message about a savior to deliver us from our sins so that we escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven, this is a foreign language to them. It shouldn't have been. Go back to the first chapter of Isaiah. Isaiah is trying to communicate the message to them. Chapter 1 verse 4, "Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evil doers, just like your parents, sons who act corruptly. They have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel. They've turned away from Him. Where will you be stricken again as you continue in your rebellion?"

Then this, "The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint - "" or weak. Like Jeremiah 17, "The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." - "From the sole of the foot to the head, there's nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts, raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged nor softened with oil. Your land is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. Your fields, strangers are devouring them in your presence.' " He talks about desolation. "Hear the Word of the Lord," verse 10, "you rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me? Your phony religions,' says the Lord. 'I've had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. All your religion is hypocritical and useless. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of

you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer. Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies, which, by the way, God ordained. I cannot endure iniquity in the solemn assembly.

“I hate your new moon festivals, your appointed feasts. They become a burden to Me, I’m weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I’ll hide My eyes from you, even though you multiply prayers I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Reprove the ruthless. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord, “though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.”

They needed salvation. They desperately needed salvation. They were a wicked people. And as I said, right at this juncture of the reign of Manasseh, the worst of them leaving them to behave like Canaanites, they desperately needed salvation and redemption. So when you come to the servant songs of Isaiah chapter 42, the promises that He’s going to bring salvation. Chapter 42 is...I wish I could read it all to you. But “Thus says the Lord God – ” verse 5 – “who created the heavens and stretched them out, spread out the earth and its offspring, gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.

“I am the Lord, I’ve called You in righteousness. I’ll hold You by the hand. I’ll watch over You. I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations.” He’s talking to the Servant. He’s talking to the Messiah. “I’m going to make You the covenant to the people. I’m going to make You the light to the nations. I’m going to have You open blind eyes, bring prisoners out of the dungeon. Sing to the Lord – ” —verse 10 — “a new song. Sing His praise from the end of the earth. The Lord is going to bring salvation to His people.”

Chapter 43, verse 1, “Thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel, don’t fear for I have redeemed you. I’ve called you by My name. You’re mine. When you pass through the waters I’ll be with you and through the rivers they’ll not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you’ll not be scorched. The flame won’t burn you. I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel – ” what’s the next line? Your what? – “Your Savior.” – I’m your Savior. I’m your Savior. Verse 11 – “I, even I the Lord and there is no savior besides Me. It is I who have declared and saved. Thus says the Lord – ” verse 14 – “your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

I’m going to be your Savior. I’m going to be your Redeemer. And that’s why this section begins comfort, in chapter 40, comfort. Comfort My people, speak kindly to Jerusalem, call out to her. Her warfare has ended, her iniquity has been removed. She’s already received double from the hand of the Lord for all of her evil. Salvation is coming. Did they need salvation? Yes. The diagnosis that’s given in chapter 1 is reiterated in brief in chapter 6 when Isaiah has a vision of God. And he says, “I’m a man with unclean lips and I dwell amidst a people of unclean lips.” Isaiah understood the need for salvation, the need for cleansing.

So the centerpiece section of these three nines, the first has to do with salvation from Babylon; the last eschatological kingdom salvation; the middle one, salvation from sin for the people of God, Jew and Gentile. And it’s going to come through the Servant who will be the Savior sent from God. So, the middle section, listen, chapter 49 to 57, the middle chapters are 52 and 53. And the middle verse of 53 is verse 5, “He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, the chastening for our wellbeing fell on Him and by His scourging we are healed.” Middle section, middle chapters, middle of the chapter, middle verse. Everything just focuses down on the substitutionary piercing of the Servant of Jehovah for us.

By what means will God save His people? By what means will He forgive their sins? By the substitutionary vicarious death of His Servant, His Slave, the Messiah, the righteous King. And that one will fulfill this prophecy. This text, dear friends, points to the Lord Jesus Christ, is so clear as to be unmistakable.

Now let me give you a little history. Ancient Jews interpreted this prophecy as messianic originally, okay? In all the ancient Jewish literature, this chapter, 53, this whole area, whole section, mid-section of the final 27, it was all messianic. All of it was messianic, though they were not clear on how the Messiah would suffer. When they came to chapter 53, they wrote this, the rabbis wrote this, “That He will be compassionate, that He will sympathetically feel our pain,” and that’s as far as they would go.

They understood that He would be a sympathetic Messiah, that He would be a righteous King, put another way, who felt so sorry that such a noble people had suffered so greatly that He felt their pain. They saw no messianic substitutionary death in spite of the fact that every day of their history animals were dying, portraying substitutionary death. All they saw in their writing was sympathy, sympathy. This messianic view of this section, by the way, shows up in the Jewish liturgy for the Day of Atonement.

This is a quote what they would say. "Horror has seized upon us. We have none to deliver us. He has born the yoke of our iniquities and our transgressions, is wounded because of our transgression. He bears our sin on His shoulder that He may find pardon for our iniquities. We are healed by His wound at the time the eternal will create Him as a new creation. O bring Him up from the circle of the earth. Raise Him up from Seir to assemble in the second time on Mount Lebanon by the hand of Yinon." *Yinon* is a Hebrew word for Messiah.

So they literally at the Day of atonement event paraphrased Isaiah 53 and then back away from it and say it simply means He'll be sympathetic toward us. The idea of Messiah Himself dying? Not possible, unacceptable. That's why Jesus went to the Old Testament to speak of His necessary suffering and the apostles even preached that. They had no interest in that.

Listen, here's the point. This is very important. They had no need of a savior. They had no need of a sacrifice for sin. Nobody in a works system needs a savior. They needed a sympathizer. They welcomed a sympathizer. They wanted a King who was sympathetic to their plight and thus would come out of sympathy and compassion and give them what they actually deserved. That was the view of ancient Judaism. That was the view of New Testament Judaism. That was the view of post-New Testament Judaism. That is the view of modern Judaism.

Judaism would never define itself in the terms of Isaiah 1, sick from head to toe. They don't need a savior. You see, if you don't understand the doctrine of depravity, and you don't understand that you are unable to save yourself by anything you do, then you don't need a savior to save you. You achieve salvation. And any system that has any achievement that saves, has no place for a vicarious, substitutionary atonement. After the Lord Jesus came, and the church was born, the church clearly interpreted Isaiah 53...all the New Testament writers, as I said, did, the church began to preach to the Jews that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53.

They didn't want to hear that, so they persecuted the church. They killed the Christians, as you know. And even to this day, Judaism as an institution rejects Jesus Christ and rejects Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Isaiah 53. When I read it to you earlier, it was a moving experience, wasn't it?, just to hear it read, because every Christian reader feels the power of this description of Jesus Christ. You feel the power of His sin-bearing work on your behalf on the cross. On the other hand, a Jew reading that sees something completely different. He sees...this is the common interpretation...Israel there. This is suffering Israel.

Israel is the suffering servant who has suffered and suffered and suffered and will one day enter into glory. The glory of Israel is coming, but right now they're going through suffering, unfair, maybe unjust. This is a flattering Jewish view of Isaiah 53, that they as a noble people are suffering unjustly, going through agonies. But some day they will emerge into the glory promised to them, and they will become *the* supreme nation and bless the whole world. They will earn their glory by their religion, by their self-righteousness, and listen, by their suffering, but Jesus isn't in Isaiah 53.

Well, that's why Isaiah 53 has been called The Torture Chamber of the Rabbis. Isaiah 53 has been called the guilty conscience of the rabbis because you can't put Israel in here. Israel was not a humble, is not a humble sufferer. Israel is not a voluntary sufferer. Israel is not a righteous, sinless people suffering unjustly in one sense and yet, vicariously, for anyone else. There is no way in the world to make Israel the object of Isaiah 53. This has to be Jesus.

But at this point, I just want to mark out for you something that will be helpful. Israel then, Israel at the time of Jesus, and Israel now has no need for a substitutionary sacrifice. They have no need for a vicarious savior. They have no need for a Mediator to die for them. All they need is a sympathizing king. They just want a ruler. They just need a king. No need for a savior to bear their sins; no need for a savior to take the wrath of God for them. They just need a King to rescue them from all the suffering and all the injustice, and the pain and give them the exaltation that they're entitled to by virtue of their Abrahamic descent, Davidic promise, and their own goodness.

So, whenever you talk to a Jew, the question to ask them is, "Do you need a savior? Do you need a savior?" Christianity offers you a savior. Do you need a substitute to die in your place? Do you need someone to bear the wrath of God against your sin? That's the question. And that goes back to the question of all questions: How can a sinner be right with God so as to escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven? And the only answer is, "If that sinner has had his sins completely paid for. And the only one that can do that is the chosen vicariously substituted sacrifice, Jesus Christ Himself.

The fundamental, and it is a critical thing, the fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity is this. Judaism is a religion that magnifies human effort and doesn't need a savior. Christianity is a religion that depreciates human effort and desperately needs a savior. That's the difference. Jews don't need a substitute to bear the penalty for their sins. God will accept them based on Abraham and based on their goodness and their privileges and their promises. That's the difference. Don't for a minute think that there's not a massive gulf fixed between those two. Jews don't need a savior to save them from their sins personally. They just need a deliverer to rescue them from their enemies and their difficulties. Christians need a savior to save them from their personal transgressions, iniquities, and sins.

So, the question to ask any Jew is, "Do you personally need a savior to take your place and die under the judgment of God for your sins? Do you need a savior?" That's the question. And that is the moral problem of all human existence. "My Servant - " verse 11 of 53 - "My Servant will justify the many, He'll make them right with God - " How? - "He will bear - " What? - "their iniquities." In the atonement, the Servant of Jehovah justifies many. He's promised in the Old Testament to come from the nation of Israel, descend from Abraham, to come down through the family of David. The Old Testament says He'll be born in Bethlehem, Isaiah said He'd be born of a virgin.

But it's not until He arrives that we know who He is. They couldn't know who He is. But when He arrived, we know who He is because at His baptism from heaven, the voice of the Father, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." What was God saying there? He was echoing [Isaiah 42:1](#), "Behold My Servant whom I uphold, My chosen One in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him." That's what happened at the baptism. The Spirit descended like a dove. The sufficient Servant by the very testimony of God and the arrival of the Holy Spirit, is none other than Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So in closing, turn to Acts 8. I did pretty good. I thought I'd be an hour and a half, this morning. I'm going to close with Acts 8. There's no way around this. The rest won't be this long. You remember Philip and the eunuch in Acts 8? And Philip is led by the Spirit to go to the chariot of this man who is an official in the court. And he comes to this man, he's a...he's a Gentile proselyte to Judaism, he's been to Jerusalem, he's reading Isaiah. He's reading Isaiah, the prophet. And he asks him in verse 30, "Do you know what you're reading?" And he says, "How can I unless someone guides me."

So Philip got up into the chariot and the passage he was reading, "He was led as a sheep to slaughter as a lamb before its shearers is silent so He doesn't open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away. Who will relate His generation for His life is removed from the earth?" Right out of Isaiah 53. "And the eunuch answered, and Philip said, 'Please tell me of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of someone else?'" Who's he talking about? I love this. "Philip opened his mouth and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him." Folks, that's what we're going to do. We're going to preach Jesus from that same Scripture.

Father, we thank You for our time, this morning, a time to celebrate, time to rejoice, time to worship, time to contemplate the greatness of Your Word and Your Son and our Savior. Be with us to bless us, we pray today. In His wonderful name we pray. Amen.