

September 20 Su Reading B263 — Isaiah 53 — The Suffering Servant

Audio: [Isaiah 53 \(ESV\)](#)

An Unexpected Offer — I have heard of some modern-day Jews who heard part of this OT chapter read, which caused them to think that it was from the NT. The predictions are so close to the details of Jesus' death that it seems impossible to miss the conclusion that He was the expected Messiah. Again, God shows His pattern of choosing to do things in unexpected ways. The Messiah "*had no form or majesty ... and no beauty*" (v. 2), and because of that, He didn't fit the accepted human model, "*he was despised and rejected by men*" (v. 3). It was also unexpected that God would offer Himself to pay for the sins that we commit, yet the sinless Messiah "*was pierced for our transgressions*" (v. 5). It is also surprising that while this innocent man was going through the pain of being falsely condemned, beaten, and crucified, "*he opened not his mouth*" (v. 7) in complaint. It was an intentional, willing, purposeful sacrifice. Although none of us would have thought to bring about the offer of salvation in that way, "*it was the will of the LORD to crush him*" (v. 10) in order that He would "*make many to be accounted righteous*" (v. 11). What a Savior! What a Suffering Servant!

September 21 M Reading B264 — Isaiah 54 — Forget the Shame

Audio: [Isaiah 54 \(ESV\)](#)

Out of the Depths — God speaks to His people here in the context of their exile in Babylon, which was brought about by their own disobedient abandonment of God. Their punishment brought them very low and they felt the shame and disgrace of their condition (v. 4). God described their exile as being "*a brief moment [when] I deserted you*" (v. 7a) but immediately followed it with promised hope: "*with great compassion I will gather you*" (v. 7b). He promised that they would "*spread abroad ... and your offspring will possess the nations*" (v. 3), and "*in righteousness you shall be established*" (v. 14). God's compassion would follow His punishment with His grace that is greater than His wrath. That is true for us today as well. Sometimes we dig pits of punishment for ourselves. Will we learn from it and turn back to God's love and forgiveness? He is waiting to establish us in righteousness after learning from His painful discipline. Loving restoration lies on the other side of repentance.

September 22 Tu Reading B265 — Isaiah 55 — Return to the Lord

Audio: [Isaiah 55 \(ESV\)](#)

Repenting Surrender — This chapter closes a long section with an urgent, loving invitation. Four times in the first verse, God called people to "*come*." This invitation assumes that "*everyone ... thirsts*" but are not sure where to satisfy it. Most people search for satisfaction in the wrong places; they "*spend ... money for that which is not bread and ... labor for that which does not satisfy*" (v. 2). Satisfaction comes only from God, so the urgent call is, "*Seek the LORD while he may be found*" (v. 6). Verse 7 provides a wonderful description of repentance, which is that "*the wicked forsake his way, and ... return to the LORD*." That 180-degree turn acknowledges that one's selfish ways have not provided true satisfaction but that it requires a step of surrender to what God has promised. C.S. Lewis took that step and described it in his book as being "Surprised by Joy." It comes as a surprise because God said, "*my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD*" (v. 8). It had not seemed logical or possible before because of our earth-bound minds. Those who take that step, however, "*shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace*" (v. 12). True satisfaction is found only in surrender.

Being Fully Accepted — God opens this chapter with four things He requires for those who would follow Him: “*Keep justice, and do righteousness ... [one who] keeps the Sabbath ... and keeps ... from doing any evil*” (vv. 1-2). That involves being fair, doing good, being faithful, and keeping pure. These concepts are equally appropriate for us today. Some followers, however, felt left out, not wholly accepted, like the foreigner, who was not a descendant of Jacob. Almost all of us Christians fall into that racial category. When Jesus cleansed the temple, He quoted from verse 7 of this chapter, saying, “*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations*” (Mark 11:17), showing that non-Jews are equally welcome. The eunuch also felt left out because he had no descendants, but God promised him “*an everlasting name*” which was “*better than sons and daughters*” (Isa. 56:5). This might correspond today to some Christians who are ostracized from their families because they left their family religion. The last section of this chapter considers the sad state of much of the leadership of the Jewish people. Their prophets were said to be “*watchmen ... blind ... without knowledge*” (v. 10) and their selfish political leaders had “*a mighty appetite ... [and] turned to their own way, each to his own gain*” (v. 11). We will read more about these kinds of people in the next chapter.

Contrite and Lowly — What a difficult time God’s people gave Him! The truly “*righteous man perishes*” (v. 1), but no one seemed to care. His people were drifting toward idolatry, mocking God (v. 4), burning with lust, sacrificing their children (v. 5), and worshiping idols (v. 7). Following these pagan ways was not satisfying but they did not acknowledge it: “*You were wearied with the length of your way [or “road”], but you did not say, ‘It is hopeless’*” (v. 10). They did not repent even though God disciplined them: “*I struck him ... but he went on backsliding*” (v. 17). Hope was promised, however, for those who would turn to God: “*he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land ... I dwell ... with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit*” (vv. 13, 15). God works with people who feel bad about their sin and are humble in their relationship with God and others. That is such a simple requirement, but it is so hard to implement because of our sinful nature. We resist acknowledging our faults because we want positive recognition, and we avoid being lowered in other’s eyes because we want to be praised. It is much better, however, to willingly and obediently follow God’s way with a repentant and humble spirit.

Superficial Worship — God confronted His people in this chapter about their mechanical and insincere worship. They were going through the motions of seeking God as if they were righteous (v. 2). Although they fasted, they sought their own pleasure (vv. 3, 13) and they continued to “*oppress all [their] workers*” (v. 3). Then, God described the kind of fasting He desires: “*to loose the bonds of wickedness ... to let the oppressed go free ... to share your bread ... and ... your house*” (vv. 6-7). He wants to see worship that is accompanied by a changed life shown in helping others. God then used several “*if ... then*” statements to emphasize the benefits of godly living and genuine worship: “*... then shall your light break forth like the dawn ... you shall call, and the LORD will answer ... you shall take delight in the LORD*” (vv. 8, 9, 14). God doesn’t respond to ritual; He responds to righteousness. We shouldn’t bring to church a week’s worth of burdens of unrighteous attitudes, words, and actions. Instead, we should worship Him genuinely with a pure, forgiven heart. When one of those embarrassing memories from our past comes to mind, we should acknowledge it as sin and ask for God’s forgiveness. Then we can worship for *His* own pleasure!

Dealing With Sin — There are three sections in this chapter that deal with a moral situation with God's people. First was the *problem* of sin: "*your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God*" (v. 2a). When bad things happen, many people ask, "Where was God in all of this?!" The answer might be that "*your sins have hidden his face from you*" (v. 2b). Verses 3-8 list many of those sins, like murder, lying, dishonesty, and injustice. These were not accidental sins but were premeditated and desired: "*Their feet run to evil*" (v. 7). The second section involves the *confession* of sin. Notice the abrupt change in pronouns at this point, going from, "*they have made their roads crooked*" (v. 8), in the first section, to, "*justice is far from us*" (v. 9) in the next section. Isaiah was admitting that *their* problem is *our* problem. Our people are sinful and our nation needs help. Does that sound like the condition of your nation? It is certainly true where I live. Our moral condition makes us "*grope for the wall like the blind ... [and] stumble at noon*" (v. 10). How about this one: "*he who departs from evil makes himself a prey*"? (v. 15). The bad people are seen as those who try to do good! Third, is the *solution* for sin: "*a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression*" (v. 20). Notice how differently God looks at one who turns from evil compared to the majority of people. It is also good to see that the solution for sin doesn't come from humans but from God. When "*there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation*" (v. 16). He would send the Messiah. The problem of sin is conquered by its confession and God's salvation.