

This morning we are finishing the Jesus in the Old Testament series, looking at Isaiah the prophet. The word prophet **usually makes us think “future-teller.” But in reality their function was as covenant-mediators.** God had made a covenant at Mt. Sinai, and whenever Israel was straying from it and in danger of bringing the curse sanctions upon themselves, God would raise up a prophet to warn them. Typically they would warn them of what was to come, call them to repentance, and often prophesy the doom that was coming. But they almost always followed that up with promises of grace and restoration from God, that after the time of punishment would come restoration.

Isaiah was a prophet who lived many centuries before Jesus who spoke the words of God to the people of Judah (southern Israel) in order to warn them about the judgment that was coming if they would not repent and trust in God instead of in Assyria, a nation who was hoping to conquer them. He warns them of the exile that is coming, but throughout the prophecy also speaks of a figure called the Branch, the servant, the chosen one, commonly known as the Messiah, a heroic figure who will do for Israel what they could not do for themselves.

But in the midst of all this hope about the Messiah figure comes chapters 52 & 53, which describes this hero in a manner completely out of character for what the Israelites would have expected. Imagine being an Israelite and hearing this – **how would you understand this chapter:**

*Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 - See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. <sup>14</sup> Just as there were many who were appalled at him--his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness-- <sup>15</sup> so will he 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. <sup>NIV</sup> **Isaiah 53:1** Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> **Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,** yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> **But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;** the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> 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 her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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 chapter would have been shocking for its original hearers – this Messiah, this chosen one, this conquering hero – how can these words be true about him? Three reasons this would have been so troubling:

- 1) **The servant will die a violent death** – verse 5 says he was pierced - run through in the Hebrew, a very violent death. How does that fit with being a conquering hero who will free God's people from oppression? How could this servant bring an end to violence by undergoing such extreme violence?
- 2) **The servant will die FOR the nation** (v.5) – He will die for their transgressions. Now, certainly the Israelites were familiar with the concept of the animal sacrifice, where an animal died in place of the person who deserved to die. But a human sacrifice? The Bible is clear that human sacrifice is wrong, so how can a human pay for the sins of the nation? So not only will the servant die a violent death in order to free his people from violence and oppression, but he will die FOR the nation's sins, a perfect human sacrifice. How would an Israelite make sense of this?
- 3) **The servant will die voluntarily** (v.4) – Isaiah writes that the servant will take up our infirmities, which means he will pick them up and put them on his back in Hebrew. How can God endorse suicide, someone who voluntarily dies?

How do you make sense of this? This servant doesn't fit the profile of a conquering hero who will redeem the people of God from oppression. How do you

explain this servant, who will voluntarily choose to die a violent death, and that somehow this death will pay for the sins of the nation? Who could this servant be?

We find the answer in Acts 8:26-39, the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch:

*Acts 8:26-39 - Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road-- the desert road-- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." <sup>27</sup> So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup> and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup> The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." <sup>30</sup> Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. <sup>31</sup> "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. <sup>32</sup> The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." <sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" <sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup> And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup> When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.*

In Acts 8, we find an Ethiopian eunuch who has gone all the way to Jerusalem to worship God, and he's coming back reading the scroll of Isaiah. Philip finds him reading from Isaiah 53, and the eunuch asks him who the passage is about. And Philip tells him the good news about Jesus. **That's the answer – this is not just an ordinary man, but the very Son of God.** His voluntary death is not suicide, because it is His own life to lay down. And He can die for the nations because He lives a perfect life. And it explains the violence of the death, since he will be killed for their sins.

Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, we have these prophecies about this Messiah who will come and die for on the sins of the people and be killed, but will rise again and be exalted to a place that will silence kings.

Do you not understand that this is no ordinary book, and this is no ordinary person? This book testifies to the salvation God is bringing to the world through the giving of His Son Jesus.

### **So what are the implications of this reality for us?**

#### **1) The real enemy that needed to be defeated was sin**

If all that was needed was another political exodus, then God could have sent another Moses. And the Messiah would have been a conquering hero. But instead, the Messiah comes, suffers, and dies. Why? The real enemy was sin.

*Hebrews 9:22 - In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

We had rebelled and gone our own way. No one could live up to God's perfect standards. We were all destined for eternal separation. The only way to save us was for God to take the initiative.

*Isaiah 59:15-18 - Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. <sup>16</sup> He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him.*

#### **2) The only way to defeat sin was for the perfect son of God to take our punishment**

God's justice must be met. There must be punishment for sin. And so Jesus came to earth. Lived the perfect life and died a sacrificial death on the cross. He came willingly.

*Matthew 26:39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

Christmas is the celebration of the incarnation – God became flesh, not just as a tourist but as a Savior, a rescuer.

#### **3) God loves you**

Why would he do this?

**Hebrews 12:2** - *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

What was the joy set before him? What was the only thing he did not have? You. Out of love for you, he endured all of it.

Listen to Brennan Manning in his book *The Signature of Jesus*:

*“On the night of December 13, during what began as a long and lonely hour or prayer, I heard in faith Jesus Christ say, ‘For love of you I left my Father’s side. I came to you who ran from me, fled me, who did not want to hear my name. For love of you I was covered with spit, punched, beaten, and affixed to the wood of the cross.’*

*These words are burned on my life. Whether I am in a state of grace or disgrace, elation or depression, that night of fire quietly burns on. I looked at the crucifix for a long time, figuratively saw the blood streaming from every pore of his body, and heard the cry of his wounds: ‘This isn’t a joke. It is not a laughing matter to me that I have loved you.’ The longer I looked, the more I realized that no man has ever loved me and no one ever could love me as he did. I went out of the cave, stood on the precipice, and shouted into the darkness, ‘Jesus, are you crazy? Are you out of your mind to have loved me so much?’ I learned that night what a wise old man had told me years earlier: ‘Only the one who has experienced it can know what the love of Jesus Christ is. Once you have experienced it, nothing else in the world will seem more beautiful or desirable.’*

God loves you so much that he sent his son into the world, so that all who believe might have eternal life.

**Romans 5:6-8** - *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*

Christmas is a story about a God who saw his people hurting themselves and each other, caught in their sins and struggles and unable to save themselves from the

oppression they were under. It's about a God who could have punished his people as a result, but instead chose to willingly take the curse upon himself so that his people might be forgiven and experience the eternal life they were meant to live.

Titanic parallel. This is the only way to save you. His death was to save you. It's not just Barney. It is a rescuing love.