Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Sovereign Servant, Part 2
Scripture: Isaiah 53:10-12
Code: 90-444

Open your Bible to the 53rd chapter of Isaiah for one final time. This is message number ten in this series, and I will tell you that it is with great reluctance that I say farewell to this. It has found its way, has this chapter, into the fabric of my soul, into my spiritual DNA. But then again, every passage seems to do that to me. This one, however, rises above the rest in so many ways. I've tried to share those with you in the last nine hours that we have gone through this chapter.

When we began this study a couple of months ago, I introduced to you the fact that the truth in this chapter would answer the most important, essential, vital, critical question that can ever be asked. That this chapter would provide the answer to the most weighty, serious, meaningful query of all. That the question this chapter answers is more important than any other question. It is more important than all other questions combined. It is infinitely more important than all other questions combined. And the question that is answered in this chapter has nothing to do with health, it has nothing to do with wealth, it has nothing to do with success, it has nothing to do with education, it had nothing to do with sociology, it has nothing to do with religion, *per se*, it has nothing to do with politics, morality, or philosophy. It transcends all those questions and in fact, the question that this answers is the question for which the Bible was written.

The Bible was written to answer this question that is preeminently answered in this very chapter. What is the question? The question is this: How can a sinner be forgiven fully and reconciled to holy God and thus escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven? That is the question of all questions. And since every human being will live forever, either in eternal hell or eternal heaven, that is the question that is most desperately needing to be answered. How can a sinner be forgiven fully, reconciled to holy God so as to escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven? That is the supreme moral question. It is the supreme spiritual question. It is the supreme religious question for which no system of morality, no mystical spirituality, and no religion has an answer – other than Christianity – and the Bible is written to give that answer.

If you take that question and that answer out of the Bible, the Bible is like any other book. It is for this question and this answer that holy Scripture was revealed. And as far as the Old Testament is concerned, it is nowhere answered more clearly than in Isaiah 53, as we have learned. That makes this a pinnacle chapter in the Old Testament. This is the Mount Everest of the Old Testament. It is a Holy Spirit-inspired prophecy of the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, 700 years before He came. When we introduced the series, I told you that some commentators through the

years have called it the fifth gospel. I wouldn't call it that. I would call it the first gospel, and Matthew is number two, and Mark is number three, and Luke is number four, and John is number five.

This is the first gospel. This is an account of the God-man who came into the world to die for sinners, rose again to provide salvation, and has been exalted to heaven. It is not only the first gospel; I would even be so bold as to say this is the first epistle. The first epistle. You can put this one right after the book of Acts, right before Romans, because the message here is not only the same message you read in the four gospels, but it is the same interpretation of the gospels that you find in the writings of Paul and Peter and John. And thus, it is a demonstration without parallel in the Old Testament of divine authorship, for here is the record of the life and death by crucifixion, by piercing and burial, of the Lord Jesus Christ 700 years ahead of time with details. And here is the New Testament interpretation of that death and resurrection that says exactly what we read in the epistles of the New Testament.

As we have been learning, the words of this glorious chapter, chapter 53, are all in the past tense. And while it is a prophecy of the future, it is not in particular primarily a prophecy of the events of the life of Christ. It is first a prophecy of the final conversion of Israel when in the future, as Zechariah put it, they look on the One they've pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son, and the Spirit of grace and supplication comes upon them, and the fountain of cleansing is open to them, and they come to know God. That's what Zechariah 12 and 13 say is going to happen in the future.

The promise of God in Ezekiel 36 is the future salvation of Israel. It is repeated in Jeremiah 31, and it is affirmed in Zechariah 12, 13, and 14. That's where Paul draws down what he says in Romans 11, that all Israel will be saved. The prophet Isaiah is given a vision of that future salvation of Israel at the end of human history, right before the coming of Jesus Christ, when they look back on Him whom they have pierced and they see Him for who He really is and they embrace Him as Lord and Savior, are cleansed from their sins, saved, and come into the true knowledge of God. When that happens in the future, these are the words they will say. This is their confession. That's why all the verbs are in the past tense and the pronouns are plural. This is Israel making its confession in the future.

And while the confession here is the future confession of Israel that brings salvation to the nation, it is also the same confession made by every Jew and Gentile since Christ by which we are saved. Someday Israel will make this confession; we've already made it. We have already acknowledged that He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. We've already acknowledged the Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. We acknowledge that it pleased the Lord to crush Him because He was a guilt offering. We get that. We believe that. We believe in the vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sinners. We believe that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of God's people to whom the stroke was due. He took our stroke, our judgment. We believe that – that's why we're saved.

This is the gospel. This confession is the heart of salvation theology. Here is the doctrine of justification by the imputation of our sins to the righteous One, the servant of Jehovah who becomes the substitutionary sacrifice, dying in our place, taking the punishment meted out by God for our sins and for all the sins of all who will ever believe in Him. And one day the Jews will say this – and we've already said it: "He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment for our well-being fell on Him and by His scourging" – His stripes – "we are healed." Someday the Jews will say, "The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. Someday they will say, "For the transgression of My people to whom the stroke was due, He was cut off." Someday they will say that.

And listen, until someone says that, they cannot be saved. There is no other way to be saved. There are preachers, pastors, who are happy to announce that the Jews can be saved today without Christ. That is not true. Any Jew or any Gentile can be saved today. This congregation is made up of Jews and Gentiles who have already made this confession. But no one can be saved apart from this confession. We rejoice that someday the nation will make that confession in a great work of sovereign grace when God through His Holy Spirit of grace comes upon them, regenerates them, they look back, they see Christ, they reverse the decision that they have been making for two thousand years, and they embrace Him as Savior.

This is their confession. This is my confession. This is your confession. It doesn't stop at the cross. We also, along with them, confess that even though He was a guilt offering, verse 10, "He will see His offspring. He will prolong His days; the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. And as a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied." The confession also includes His resurrection. If He is dead, how can He see His offspring? How can He prolong His days? How can He accomplish the good pleasure of the Lord and see and be satisfied? Only if He rises from the dead. We confess that not only did Jesus die but He rose again. Romans 10, "If you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and confess Him as Lord, you'll be saved." That's what we believe. That's how we see it. That's how the Jews will see it.

But that's not, in and of itself, the last word. Are we right? Are we right? Listen, this understanding of the doctrine of justification – substitutionary, vicarious atonement – has been under attack since the New Testament time. It is under attack today. There are theologians who deny the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ as a provision for the sins of all who will ever believe individually. There is always a battle over this doctrine. In fact, it appeared as if the battle was lost for a thousand years until the Reformation recovered it. Did we get it right? Is what we read here, this future confession of the Jews, is this an accurate understanding of the cross? Is this an accurate understanding of the meaning of the death of Christ and His resurrection? And not only His death and resurrection, but His exaltation? Because, according to chapter 52:13, He will be high, He will be lifted up, He will be greatly exalted, He will startle many nations, He will silence – He will shut the mouths of all the

world's monarchs because He will be so superior to them. That speaks not only of His coming the first time to die but His coming the second time to reign.

Did the Jews get it right? Do they see it correctly? Is that just the way we see it? Or is that the way God sees it? How does God see the cross? Well, we know from the beginning of this text, chapter 52 verses 13 to 15, that God is the speaker, "Behold my servant" – My slave, *ebed*, the slave of Jehovah, which has been the title of Messiah all the way back to chapter 42. So we know that God here is the speaker, first person, and He is describing the career of the Messiah, His slave, and He says He will succeed, He will be high and lifted up, greatly exalted, He will startle many nations. So it speaks of His exaltation and His sovereignty. In verse 14, the one in the middle, it speaks of His disfigurement, His marring, His scarring, and it will be worse than any human. His form will be more despicable, more disfigured than any man. So He is telling us that the career of His servant who is to come will include glory and suffering. That's an enigma to the Jews.

I was reading a book on a flight last night from Seattle down here, and it was a book that was describing what the rabbis think and have thought through history about this portion of Scripture. And they were on the horns of this enigma. How can the Messiah be exalted and glorified and disfigured more than any man? And the machinations that they went through throughout their history – all the way past the time of Christ, all the way up to the modern day – to try to explain how this can describe Messiah are almost infinite. How do you resolve that?

Well, chapter 53 resolves it simply by saying before He will be exalted, He will be humbled. We understand that. His first coming is to be disfigured and executed. His second coming is to reign and rule. That's how we understand it. But is that consistent with the way God understands it? After all, it's God's perspective that matters. The problem of salvation, the problem of forgiveness, the problem of reconciliation, the problem of eternal life or the issue of eternal life is not about how we view things. It isn't the final court to say this is how we view it. The final court is to see how God views it. I want God's view of the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. And so we have that in the last two verses of this amazing chapter.

Starting in the middle of verse 11, God speaks. The pronouns all change. They go from being plural to singular. The verbs go from being past tense to future. It goes from the Jews as a nation, looking back to the cross, to God speaking, looking forward to the cross. And what is God's view? Listen, starting with, "By His knowledge," verse 11. "By His knowledge the Righteous One, My servant, will justify the 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 sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors." Those are the very words of God, solving the enigma of verses 13 to 15 in chapter 52. This is God's view. The pronouns, My and I; the verbs, future; God personally speaking, predicting the very reality that the Jews will confess. He is predicting the death of the Righteous One. He is predicting that He

will pour Himself out to death. He is predicting that it will be a sin-bearing death, that He will bear the sins of the many, and that by that He will justify the many. That is the doctrine of vicarious, substitutionary atonement – justification by imputation. That is the great doctrine that has been confessed by the future generation of Jews and by all of us, and God affirms it. God affirms it.

God affirms the deity of His servant when in verse 11 He identifies Him as the Righteous One. The Righteous One. I'll say more about that in a moment. He affirms His humanity when He speaks of Him pouring out Himself to death and being included among the transgressors. But mostly He refers to His vicarious, substitutionary, sacrificial atonement when He says in verse 11, "He will bear their iniquities," and in verse 12, "He bore the sin of many." Even affirms His resurrection because "He will allot Him a portion with the great and divide the spoil with the strong." He affirms His mediation, His intercession and the last line, He "interceded for the transgressors." So here is a word from Yahweh, a word from Jehovah, declaring the answer to life's supreme question: How can a sinner be forgiven fully and reconciled to God, being delivered therefore from eternal hell to eternal heaven? The answer of God is through the death of the Righteous One who dies in the sinner's place, paying in full the penalty for sin. This is God's affirmation.

Let's look more closely at it. As I said, God is the speaker – Yahweh, God the Father is the speaker again – and He introduces His servant again. "My servant," He calls Him in verse 11 – and that's what He called Him when He introduced Him back in 52:13, "My servant, the servant of Jehovah" – that Messianic title we're familiar with. But I want to focus at the Righteous One, the Righteous One. There is only one who could bear that title, one in this world, one human, one man who could bear that title, the Righteous One. And that is such a marvelous Old Testament designation of the Messiah that it was familiar to the New Testament believers who knew the Old Testament. For example, Peter preaches this great sermon in the third chapter of Acts and he draws down that title. He says, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified His slave, Jesus, the One whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate when He had decided to release Him, but you disowned the Holy and Righteous One" – the Righteous One. He's the only Righteous One.

Stephen preached that great sermon before he was crushed beneath the bloody stones, and he says, "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" to the Jews. They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One." The Righteous One. That had become a Messianic title. In the 22nd chapter, Paul reiterates his testimony about the Damascus Road and he says, "I went to the house of Ananias, and Ananias spoke to me about the Righteous One." Back then to the 53rd chapter. God also establishes this title here by calling His servant the Righteous One, the only One who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, in whom there was no sin, of whom He said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am" – what? – "well-pleased."

So here is God speaking of His Son, His slave, the Righteous One, and He says this, "By His knowledge He will justify the many" – the "many," meaning those who believe; the "many" meaning

the people of God; the “many” meaning those for whose sins He died and atoned, He will justify; that is, He will provide righteousness for them. He, by His sacrifice, by taking on their sins, will be able to grant them His righteousness. We understand the doctrine of justification, that He dies, the Righteous One, to justify many sinners.

The phrase that I do want to focus on, because you know those other things, is “by His knowledge.” Whose knowledge are we talking about there? It can go either way in Hebrew. It could be “by His knowledge,” and that’s what’s kind of implied in the N.A.S. – “by His knowledge” meaning the servant, the Righteous One, He will justify many. It could be referring to His knowledge of God’s plan, His understanding of God’s plan, the perfect wisdom that He possessed.

Isaiah makes a point in chapter 1 and chapter 5 about the Israelites lacking knowledge. He makes another very strong point in the 44th chapter of Isaiah about the nations’ lacking knowledge. So maybe here He’s saying, “But the Righteous One has the knowledge that it takes to do God’s will and to provide justification for the many.” The problem with that is it wasn’t by His knowledge that He justifies us; it was by His what? By His death. The Hebrew would allow us to translate it this way: “By the knowledge of Him, the Righteous One, My servant, will justify the many.” Justification will come to those who know Him – who know Him. It is best to interpret this as our knowledge of Him, of His person, of His work, of His provision in His death and resurrection, the gospel. Here God validates the Great Commission. Here God says that He will justify the many who have the knowledge of Him. Neither is there salvation in any other name. No man comes to the Father but by Me.

Listen, in Romans 10, Paul is hovering around Isaiah when He writes and even makes reference to several portions of Isaiah. And Paul says this, he says, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord” – Romans 10 – “will be saved.” But then he says, “How will they call on Him whom they don’t believe?” They can’t. Then he says, “How will they believe on Him whom they have not heard?” And then he says, “How will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they’re sent?” And then that wonderful statement: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.” It’s only the ones who know Him who can be saved. And that’s what it’s saying, by the knowledge of Him, “the Righteous One, My servant, He will justify many.” That’s why we go to the ends of the earth with the gospel. That’s why we preach to every creature. There’s no other way for them to be saved. Israel is not saved because they’re Jewish, because they’re monotheistic. They won’t be saved until, as individuals now in the age of the church or in the future at the end of the age, they look on the One they’ve pierced and mourn for Him and confess Him as Lord.

Here is God’s testimony to the urgency of proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. The many, the people for whom Christ died, can only be saved when they hear it because saving faith comes – Romans 10 – by hearing the message concerning Christ. Faith comes by hearing the Word concerning Christ. That is our mandate, and that mandate is given to us here by God Himself. There is then placed right in this very chapter the Great Commission and the call to faith

– faith based on knowledge of the true revelation of Christ.

And then God says this: Knowing Him in a saving way, knowing Him in penitent faith, will justify the many. How? How can knowing Him justify? Because He will bear their iniquities. God believes in the doctrine of justification. God believes in the doctrine of imputation because God ordained it.

He has more to say. The second half of verse 12, these are the words of Jehovah, Yahweh, speaking again of His servant, the Righteous One: “He poured out Himself to death.” It’s always – the verbs are always willing verbs. “He poured out Himself to death.” Like back in verse 7, “He was oppressed and He allowed Himself to be afflicted.” We went through all those. His willingness is replete through this entire portion of Scripture. Literally, it means He handed His soul over to death. So God is echoing the confession that we’ve read from the Jews. Yes, He handed Himself over to death. Then this wonderful statement: “And was numbered with the transgressors.” Literally, in the Hebrew it means He let Himself be included among transgressors. In fact, Jesus quotes this in Luke 22:37 before He got to the cross. Quotes these very words. It is a reference to His incarnation, that He was literally embedded among transgressors. He lived among transgressors. He mingled in this world. And from a visual standpoint, He didn’t look any different than anybody else. There was no halo. He didn’t move two feet off the ground. He had no stately form or majesty. Nothing about His appearance made Him attractive. He looked like every other man. He walked like every other man. He spoke in a voice like every other man’s voice, he ate. He did what men do.

There was nothing about Him that drew them to the conclusion that He was supernatural. That was part of the problem when He did miracles. There was such a disconnect between what He appeared to be and the power that He had, that they decided in their unbelief that that was the power of Satan somehow operating through Him. Here God affirms the incarnation. Here God Himself, in His own words, says He came down and let Himself be embedded in the world of fallen men. This is Philippians chapter 2, that He humbled Himself, took on the form of a man, a servant, and took on death, even the death of the cross.

So it’s not about His death with criminals; it’s about the fact that He came to take His place with sinners. And though He became familiar with sinners, though He would be counted as human among the transgressors, yet He Himself was able to do what no human being can do and that was bear the sin of many, though He was blended in with sinners in the world. Yet He was the only one qualified to rise above them and be the sacrifice for their sins. He is the Righteous One, God embedded in humanity, the God-man, and He appears to be like all the rest but He is capable of lifting up their sins. And like the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement – Leviticus 16 – carrying them away, and that reference is made several times, as you know, in this chapter.

And the final word from the Father about His death and His resurrection even – last line: “Interceded for the transgressors.” “Interceded for the transgressors.” I wish the translators had used in the N.A.S.

“mediated.” The word means mediated. It means to mediate, to go between, to stand between. And this is the statement of God, that Christ is the One who is between God and man. First Timothy 2:5, “There is one” – what? – “mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus.” Yes, in that mediation, He is the intercessor. He is the One who pleads our case. He is the One who is the bridge to God, the bridge to heaven. He made the required mediation possible through His death. His mediation began for us, really, in the New Testament, in John 17, before He got to the cross, when He prayed that High Priestly Prayer, the night He was betrayed and He began to pray for us. He began to pray in that incredible prayer that God would bring us all to heaven, that all that belong to Him throughout all of human history would be gathered together and that they would all be brought to glory where they could see Him in His glory and see the glory of the Father. And He began interceding for those for whom He died.

But there’s a very important sort of Hebrew note to make about the verb “interceded.” It’s an imperfect verb meaning continuous – continuous. All the previous verbs are perfect tense, which means a completed action. If you go back three verbs, “He poured out Himself to death,” that’s completed; He did that once. “He was numbered with the transgressors,” that’s His incarnation; He did that once. “He bore the sin of many”; that He accomplished on the cross, never to be repeated. Those are completed, perfected. But His intercession is imperfect because it goes on. “He ever lives to make intercession for us.” He’s ever our defender. He’s ever our intercessor. He’s ever and always our mediator until we finally get to heaven. Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:34 celebrate the mediating, interceding work of Christ.

So God Himself, then, in that section, affirms the vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice of Christ as the only offering that can satisfy His justice and provide salvation for sinners and bring to them justification. That is to say, they are declared righteous by God. That only comes to those who know Him. To know Him, that is how that justification takes place, individually. And the knowledge of Him is therefore critical. That then becomes the mandate for us to spread the knowledge of Him to the world. This is a confession the Jews will one day make. This is a confession we have already made. And this is a confession that God Himself affirms.

That finally brings us to the last word, verse 12. We have looked at the startling servant, the scorned servant, we have looked at the substituted servant, the silent servant, the slaughtered servant, and here is the sovereign servant. Beginning in verse 12: “Therefore I’ll allot Him a portion with the great and He’ll divide the booty with the strong.” Resurrection, of course, is implied because He’s now going to be rewarded. After the suffering, the satisfaction. After the sorrow, the salvation. After the death, the deliverance. After the gore, the glory. After the pain, the pleasure. After the thorns, the throne. After the cross, the crown. The first coming in humiliation; the Second Coming in exaltation.

So the text ends at the second coming. The text ends where it began, in 52:13. He will prosper, be high, lifted up, greatly exalted, startling nations, silencing kings. The text ends with a triumph and

victory parade, as the Lord God Himself sets His servant on the throne and rewards Him with all the spoils of His conquering triumph. He is exalted, He is all-glorious, He is set on a throne. This is Revelation 11, when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. This is Revelation 19, when He comes on a white horse with all the saints to judge and make war against the ungodly and then to establish His glorious Kingdom on earth for a thousand years, followed by the eternal new heavens and new earth in which He reigns and is forever exalted. This is powerful, royal imagery. This is the image of a conquering hero who returns with all the spoils of His triumph. Having overpowered all the hostile forces and embarrassed all the petty kings, He comes triumphant.

And God declares two things about Him: “I’ll allot Him a portion with the great” and “I’ll divide the booty with the strong.” This is a magnificent statement. We would expect Him to say, “I will give Him everything.” That’s true. “I will exalt Him.” As Paul says in Philippians, “I’ll give Him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.” And that name, by the way, is not Jesus; it’s the name of Jesus – Lord. That’s the name that makes us bow.

We would understand it if He said, “I’ll give Him everything,” and He will give Him everything, but that’s not the emphasis here. The emphasis here is about sharing. “I will allot Him a portion with the great, divide the spoil with the strong.” Who are the great and who are the strong? What? That’s us. How did we become great and strong when we are insignificant and weak? Actually, the word for “great” is *harabim*. Literally means the many – the many – the many He justified. We’ve seen that word “many” already. He will justify the many, end of verse 12, “He bore the sin of the many.” Here’s the many. Therefore, I’ll allot Him a portion with the many.

Well, why does the translator take it from the many to great? Because by that time, we will have been made great. You say, “Are we going to be exalted?” We are. We’re going to become heirs of God – Romans 8:17 – and joint heirs with Christ. Everything He possesses, we will possess. Is not this the magnanimous grace of God? That we don’t sit in eternity, in some sense, impoverished, watching Christ enjoy all the rewards, but everything He possesses is ours to share. This is the extent of God’s massive grace. He divides the spoils with the strong. Who are the strong? They are the weak made strong. We are the many made great and we are the weak made strong. We are the triumphant ones, that’s what that means. We march in His train.

I wish I had time to go to the book of Corinthians where Paul says, “We march in the triumph.” All the spoils that Christ won at the cross, all the redeemed of the ages will be part of a communion of fellowship everlasting that will enrich our lives. All that He possesses of the eternal glories of the new heaven and the new earth will be our possession as well. We will reign on earth in the millennial kingdom with Him. We will sit on thrones with Him. And we will reign forever and ever with Him in the glories of the new heaven and the new earth. And everything that is His will be ours.

So the promise of Isaiah is a future generation of Israel will be saved finally in the end, and this will be their confession. And God Himself affirms that this confession is a true understanding of the work of Christ on the cross. But this confession must be your confession. To repent of your sin, to know what Christ has done, to embrace Him in faith as the substitute who took your place, to confess Him as risen Lord is to be saved. Is to be saved. Whoever calls on His name will be saved and escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven. This is the only question that has an answer that affects you forever. Bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the Word. It’s so powerful and so penetrating. Thank You for giving us another marvelous vision of the cross of Christ. Now, as we come to this table, we ask that You would work in our hearts, that we would confess any sin that we have in our lives, anything that stands between us and You, and for those who don’t know Christ, may this be a time when You awaken their hearts and they come to embrace the Savior as their only hope. May this be a time of praise and worship as well as a time of conviction and repentance.

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