

God's Gift to the World (Part 1)

Isaiah 52:13-15 (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

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Families often have Christmas traditions they celebrate every year. One of the ones I have heard of is when the family will open one gift on Christmas Eve and then open the rest on Christmas morning. Do you know anyone who does that? We're going to do something like that tonight and tomorrow afternoon with this sermon. Let me explain what I mean.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is the fourth and final *Servant's Song* in Isaiah. There are five three-verse stanzas in this song. In it, God gives four gifts. We are going to open one gift tonight and the rest tomorrow evening at 4pm at the Christmas Day service.

Usually, the stanzas form the outline, but that is not the format I am going to take as we work through this last *Servant's Song*. That being said, let's read Isaiah 52:13-53:1:

¹³ *See, my servant will be successful;
he will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted.*

¹⁴ *Just as many were appalled at you—
his appearance was so disfigured
that he did not look like a man,
and his form did not resemble a human being—*

¹⁵ *so he will sprinkle many nations:
Kings will shut their mouths because of him,
for they will see what had not been told them,
and they will understand what they had not heard.*

^{53:1} *Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

Isaiah 52:13-53:1 is actually an Advent text. It tells us that God will send His Servant, and He will give amazing gifts to His people. Isaiah does not allow us to disconnect Christ's Advent from His mission to give His life as a sacrifice on the cross, does he? And this is really the problem we have at Christmas.

Christmas is often disconnected from the cross of Christ. At Christmas, we often talk about His mission to bring peace and salvation, but we fail to see that it was through His death on the cross. We forget His sufferings because Christmas is often filled with sentimentality.

Now, listen to me; I enjoy the traditions of Christmas as much as the next person, so I am not poo-pooing the traditions and celebrating the first Advent of Christ at Christmas. However, I do want us to keep our biblical theology in front of us. Christmas should not be all about the *warm fuzzies* of our traditions. It has to be more than the standard plot of a Hallmark Christmas movie.

So, we are going to open our first Christmas gift in this text. Isaiah 52:13-53:1 gives us the gift of faith. He gives us the gift of hearing, *seeing, understanding, and believing* what Jesus has done for us.

Here are my points that God helps us understand the first gift in Isaiah 52:13-53:1: *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown*. It is the gift of faith that allows us to experience His cradle, His cross, and His crown. First, we need to consider His cradle.

I. The Cradle

I like the way the English Standard Version (ESV) of the bible renders the word Hebrew word “see.” It reads, “Behold, my servant.” There is nothing wrong with the way the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) reads, “See, my servant.”

I think the word, *behold*, grabs our attention. God wants us to *behold* His Servant. There is a comma after the word *See* in the CSB and one after *Behold* in the ESV. It is there to make us pause and do what we need to do when we finally understand Jesus is God’s Servant; we need to see Jesus and, by faith, behold Him.

It might be better if the words *see and behold* were in all caps. That is how we write emails and text messages when we want people to get to the point. So, we ought to read this verse as: “BEHOLD, MY SERVANT.”

This is why at Jesus’ first advent, God wanted us to *behold* Jesus and keep *beholding* Him. When Jesus first arrived, His birth was announced by angels.

⁸And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

God is giving us the gift of *beholding*. The idea of *beholding* Jesus is for more than kings and shepherds—it is for us all.

God is enabling us by the eyes of faith to see the Christ that came in the cradle is God’s Suffering Servant. So, yes, we are to *behold* God’s Servant who was born in the city of David, but we must see beyond the cradle at Christmastime. Our eyes must track all the way to the cross of God’s Servant.

II. The Cross

Again, the gift of faith helps us see the cross in the cradle of Christ. God’s Servant came into this world just like any other person. He was born, but Jesus’ birth was not even middle class. He was poor. He was born in the most unsanitary of conditions. He was born in a barn and laid in a feeding trough that was made for livestock.

God’s Servant came to us born in the most unlikely of conditions, even in that day and time. I mean, even in that day, babies weren’t born in barns. That was the most unsanitary of conditions for a baby to be in and especially at its birth. Yet, there was Jesus, the King of Kings, born in the most appalling of conditions. His birth was appalling even to the people in the first century.

Appalling is a good word to describe how the world saw Jesus’ whole life and ministry. He was a friend of sinners. He hung out with sick people and made them well. From beginning to end, Jesus’ life was appalling.

We might read v. 14a this way:

“Behold . . . many were appalled at you!”

They were appalled when He came to this earth. So appalling was Jesus’ first advent that many who heard of it would not believe it. It was too shocking. From the cradle to the cross—Jesus shocked many of those who met Him.

But it was at the cross where people were most appalled. He was stripped of His clothes and beaten with a cat-o-nine tail so that His flesh would be slowly ripped from His body, thus maximizing His pain and causing Him to bleed out. He had a crown of thorns placed on His head. Then it was driven into His skull by Roman soldiers when they struck Him on the head with rods. Then He was forced to carry His own execution instrument to Golgotha, where He had nails driven through His feet and hands into the cross. Then He was stripped naked and

lifted up on the cross, where He hung between heaven and earth for six hours. During those hours, He was humiliated, mocked, taunted, and tortured. Finally, He died, and just to make sure He was dead, the soldiers drove a spear into His side.

Verse 14 says His appearance was so disfigured that those who saw Him were *appalled*. He didn't even look human. He looked horrific.

Verse 14 does not allow us to see Christmas from a sappy Hallmark movie perspective. Verse 14 reminds us that to see Christmas from the cradle to the cross and to see Christmas this way; we need to be given the *gift of faith*. God needs to open the eyes of our hearts and give our minds understanding.

III. The Crown

Verse 13b shows us the crown that will be given to God's Servant for the work He did in order to save His people.

*See [Behold]; my servant will be successful;
he will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted.*

Jesus' success is seen in v. 15:

*He will sprinkle many nations.
Kings will shut their mouths because of him,
for they will see what had not been told them,
and they will understand what they had not heard.*

Here we learn that God's Servant has a priestly function. Jesus carried out His priestly function when He cleansed His people by sprinkling them by His blood and with the water of His word. This is how He cleansed us and created faith in our hearts.

Conclusion:

Isaiah 53:1 closes our understanding of the gift of faith when Isaiah asks:

*Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

So, v. 1 poses the question: *Have you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ?* Have you believed in His virgin birth in a manger in Bethlehem? Have you believed in His sacrificial death on the cross for your sin? Do you believe God had raised Him from the dead and exalted Him far above every name?

The application for us in this text is the first word of Isaiah 52:13—BEHOLD! We are to behold the Lamb of God who was slain for us. Friends, may you behold the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world this Christmas Eve.