

*God's Gift to the World (Part 2)*

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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Have you ever seen the prank at Christmas when someone has a very important small gift he or she wants to give, and they take that gift and wrap it in a box, and then they wrap that box in a bigger box, and they wrap that box in a bigger box? When the person opens the gift, he or she has to open about four boxes until they get to the main gift.

The Servant Songs have kind of been like this, but it is no prank. Each song is a gift in and of itself. Each song gives important details about the Servant God promises to send, but the last song is the clearest song of the Servant. In many ways, the previous Servant Songs have been building up to this particular song. They all give us details about God's Servant, but this one paints a clear picture of the person and work of Jesus. This song is called the Suffering Servant's song.

There are five stanzas in the fourth and final Servant's Song. One way of studying this song is to work through it stanza by stanza. However, I want to focus on the gifts God gives us through His Servant. Obviously, the ultimate gift is the Servant, Himself. However, the Servant accomplished things for His people when He came, and these are the gifts I want us to focus on this evening.

Yesterday, at the Christmas Eve service, we looked at the first gift in Isaiah 52:13-53:1. In it, we saw that God gives us *the gift of faith* to behold His Suffering Servant. Now let's consider the other three gifts.

I. The Gift of Holy Substitution—Payment for Sin. (Isaiah 53:1-6)

This was one of our points from last Sunday's sermon, but this time the Servant's substitution accomplishes something different. Last Sunday, in the third Servant's Song, we learned that the Servant listened to and obeyed God for us so that His obedience became our obedience. This afternoon we see a different side of His substitution. In this song, we learn that He was the substitution for the payment of our guilt and sin.

Let's read vv. 1-6 one more time. I want you to pay close attention to the clear picture of Christ's crucifixion. It sounds like that may have been written AFTER Jesus was crucified, but it was not. Isaiah wrote the fourth *Servant's Song* around 700 BC. So, he wrote it approximately 700 years before Christ's birth.

I also want you to notice the pronouns in these six verses. Isaiah writes *as if we were there at the cross*. Notice the interplay between "he" and "we/our." Listen to vv. 1-6 again:

*Who has believed what we have heard?  
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?  
    <sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a young plant  
        and like a root out of dry ground.  
    He didn't have an impressive form  
        or majesty that we should look at him,  
    no appearance that we should desire him.  
    <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of suffering who knew what sickness was.  
He was like someone people turned away from;  
he was despised, and we didn't value him.  
    <sup>4</sup> Yet he himself bore our sicknesses,  
        and he carried our pains;*

*but we in turn regarded him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.  
<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced because of our rebellion,  
crushed because of our iniquities;  
punishment for our peace was on him,  
and we are healed by his wounds.  
<sup>6</sup> We all went astray like sheep;  
we all have turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has punished him  
for the iniquity of us all.*

Here is the deal, in reality, we were at the cross. God crushed His Son for our guilt and sin. Our sin was against God, and because we sinned against a holy God, only a holy sacrifice would be sufficient. We may not have been physically at the cross, but our sin was there. Our sin puts us at the cross of Christ. Jesus died on the cross, in our place, and for our sin.

Do you know the old African-American spiritual, “*Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?*”? It is a beautiful hymn. It gives me chills every time I sing it.

There are two questions in the first two stanzas: “*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*” And “*Were you there when they nailed Him to the cross?*” Each stanza concludes by saying, “*Ohh, sometimes it causes me to tremble. Tremble.*” The writer wants us to tremble with him because he understood that, in reality, he was there because it was his sin that nailed Jesus to the cross.

And you know what? When we consider that Isaiah painted this picture of Jesus’ death in this text some 700 years before it happened, we ought to tremble. We ought to be in awe of God’s divine plan to save sinners by sending Jesus to be our *Holy Substitute*.

Isaiah 53 ought to produce the idea of beholding and marveling at God’s plan to save us. The more I study the Bible, the more I am stunned by God’s amazing plan to save us through Christ. Let’s keep going.

Verses 4-6 are so very clear in how they explain that our sin was put on Jesus. The Bible calls the act of putting our sin on Jesus—*imputation*. It is a legal term that means our sin was charged to His account. Martin Luther calls this “*The Great Exchange*.” Our sin was charged to Jesus’ account, and the righteousness Jesus earned through His obedience to God was credited to our account. This truly is a great exchange!

Let’s drill deeper into the complex idea of Jesus as our Substitute. Here’s the deal, God cannot allow sin to go unpunished. When it comes to forgiveness of our debt of sin, He will not simply say, “*It’s okay, don’t worry about it. I’ll just forgive and forget it ever happened. It’s no big deal.*”

Our offense is against God, and we have broken His Law. He does not just blow it off. We understand that because when someone has sinned against us, we want them to make it right. We want justice or restitution. Our legal system demands it.

A few years ago, my son, Mac, was in a car accident. He had this old Chevy pickup that he and I had worked on for at least a year, maybe more, and we finally got the pickup finished. It was running well, and it looked good too. He was going down Grand, obeying the traffic laws, when a guy ran a red light and plowed into him. The problem was that the guy did not have insurance. Mac and I were crushed because of the loss, but the guy told us he was sorry, and we accepted his apology. Then we all went our separate ways. Right? Wrong! We forgave the guy but restitution needed to be made because Mac’s pickup was totaled. In order to make it right, the man paid us in cash for the pickup. At this point, justice was satisfied as far as our part was concerned.

But it is not just about justice in the big things. We also expect justice in the small things.

Think about it this way. Let’s say one of your children breaks a sibling’s toy. You probably will punish the child who broke the toy. He might have to say he is sorry and even replace the toy. This is a form of justice that

attempts to reconcile and make restitution. We understand this, and most of us practice on a regular basis to some degree.

Bottom line: In a just system of law, forgiveness of law-breaking is a transaction. Crimes must be punished, and restitution must be made as best as possible. On a personal level, when we offend, we ask for forgiveness, and the offended party gives that forgiveness. In some cases, restitution will have to be made. It would be unjust if the guilty went unpunished. *In the same way, God would be unjust to let those who have committed sins go unpunished.*

But here's the deal, we did not have a fender-bender with God. We didn't just break a toy. God is not like some old pickup that has been fixed up. He is a HOLY, HOLY, HOLY GOD, and we have sinned against Him.

The problem is, we can't make it right. We are unable to accomplish restitution. There is no amount of good that we can do to repay Him because we are sinners, and our sin is against His infinite innocence and holiness.

Our problem is that we want to do to pay him back. We try to do good in order to make up for the bad we've done, and even in that process, we continue to sin. Even in our attempts at restitution, we keep piling up sins. Is there any hope?

What is it that we need? We need someone to do for us what we could not do—live a perfect life, perfectly obey God and never sin and then give His life as our substitute in our place to pay for our debt of sin.

Jesus is God's Holy Substitute who obeyed for us and gave His life for us as our Holy Substitute on the cross. So, when God charged Jesus with our sin and guilt, His substitutionary sacrifice for us more than covered our debt of sin. His substitutionary death had infinite power to pay our penalty of sin. Then His infinite righteousness was credited to our account. He took our sin and gave us His righteousness.

Our culture finds this message hard to believe. Many people struggle with and stumble over the fact that Jesus died in our place. Yet, this is the true meaning of Christmas.

The message of Christmas is NOT, "*Behave, and you'll get a present.*" God is not some kind of cosmic Santa Claus who *is making a list and checking it twice to see if we have been naughty or nice.* The message of Christmas is not, "*He knows if you have been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake.*"

The message of Christmas is quite the opposite. The message of Christmas is an announcement to those who have been naughty, bad, and not even nice, and the announcement says, "*The only truly good person who ever lived suffered and died in your place because of your sin. You couldn't obey God, and even if you could, you wouldn't. But God's Servant obeyed for you, died for you, and rose from the dead for you even before you knew you needed Him. This is how God showed His love for you.*"

Jesus' death on the cross in your place is the very meaning of love. Now, Jesus says to us, "*Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden. Look to me, and you will rest for your weary souls, for I was despised and rejected so you could be included in God's family. I bore the sickness of your sin. A spear pierced My heart because of your rebellion. The guilt of your sin was charged to My account because you could not bear it nor pay its debt to God. I bore it, and it crushed the life out of Me. All of My sufferings purchased your peace with God. I did all of this because I love you. Trust Me and come to Me by faith, and I will find rest for your weary heart.*"

This is what Jesus says to us as our Holy Substitution. But, He is not only our Holy Substitution, He is also God's gift of Holy Satisfaction.

## II. The Gift of Holy Satisfaction (Isaiah 53:7-11a)

Let's read vv. 7-11a one more time. In general, it sounds similar to vv. 1-6. It highlights Jesus' work but with a little different emphasis. Here we learn that *Jesus' holy substitution* resulted in the *holy satisfaction* of God's justice. Jesus' guilt offering satisfied God's requirement for justice.

You see, our sins cannot simply be forgotten or swept under the rug as if they did not exist. Forgiveness is costly. Justice for our guilt and sin must be satisfied. Look in vv. 7-11:

<sup>7</sup> *He was oppressed and afflicted,*

*yet he did not open his mouth.  
 Like a lamb led to the slaughter  
 and like a sheep silent before her shearers,  
 he did not open his mouth.*  
<sup>8</sup> *He was taken away because of oppression and judgment,  
 and who considered his fate?  
 For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
 he was struck because of my people's rebellion.*  
<sup>9</sup> *He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
 but he was with a rich man at his death,  
 because he had done no violence  
 and had not spoken deceitfully.*  
<sup>10</sup> *Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him severely.  
 When you make him a guilt offering,  
 he will see his seed, he will prolong his days,  
 and by his hand, the Lord's pleasure will be accomplished.*  
<sup>11</sup> *After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied.  
 By his knowledge,  
 my righteous servant will justify many,  
 and he will carry their iniquities.*

Verses 10-11 unpack the impact of Jesus' holy substitution for His people. *His substitution satisfied God's justice.*

I know what you are thinking, "*Michael, you're talking about justice on Christmas Day! With everything that is wrong in the world and you are talking about God's justice. Really?*"

Listen, the biggest travesty of justice in this world is that God crushed His Son, who was infinitely holy and innocent of sin, in order to pay for our sins and crimes against an infinitely holy God.

It might seem unjust for God to crush the Son in place of sinners, but it was not. Scripture teaches us that God came in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself. God came in Jesus in order to satisfy His own demand for justice.

Verse 10 goes on to say that God made Him a guilt offering. The idea of the guilt offering from Leviticus. The guilt offering was given in order to satisfy God's justice.

Jesus is the *Holy Substitute* whose sacrifice was our guilt offering to God to pay for our sin and to satisfy God's demand for justice.

Verse 11 goes on to say that God's righteous Servant justified many because He carried their iniquities. In other words, His righteousness was injected into our hearts (imputed to us), and our punishment and sin were put inside of Him. He became sin for us so that we may become the righteousness of God. With this exchange, God was satisfied with Jesus and with us (His people).

The Apostle Paul says it this way in Romans 3:21-26:

<sup>21</sup> *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,  
 although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of  
 God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:  
<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his  
 grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put  
 forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show  
 God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over*

*former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

Friends, the whole idea of giving gifts at Christmas is because God gave Jesus. *For God so loved the world that He gave Himself in our place and for our sin.*

### III. The Gift of Glorious Success (Isaiah 52:13, 53:12)

Isaiah 52:13 and 53:12 are like bookends that tell us of how God rewarded His Servant for His work of listening to and obeying God and saving His people from an eternity in Hell. Isaiah 52:13 and 53:12 says:

*See, my servant will be successful;  
he will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted.  
<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will give him the many as a portion,  
and he will receive the mighty as spoil,  
because he willingly submitted to death,  
and was counted among the rebels;  
yet he bore the sin of many  
and interceded for the rebels.*

Jesus' work was successful. He was victorious. His death produced life in us. He shall see the fruits of His labor. He stands back and looks at God's plan to save sinners and the price He had to pay, and He is satisfied.

Out of the anguish of His labor, He sees all that He accomplished, and He is satisfied. Jesus is exalted! God glorifies His Servant and gives Him as His portion, or we might say *inheritance*. The inheritance is you and me. We are God's gift to His exalted Son—redeemed sinners. This is the reason the Apostle Paul writes this in Ephesians 1:18:

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints.*

Jesus does not look at us and regret He saved us. He does not look at us and feel like He made a mistake. No, He looks at us and loves us. He values us, for we are His great inheritance. So, friends—BEHOLD your Savior who looks at you and loves you deeply.