

ISAIAH — LESSON NINETEEN

ISAIAH 53:1-9

Ch. 53:1-3 – Acquaintance with Grief

Who hath believed our message? Both John and Paul quote this verse. John quotes it and then comments, “These things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory; and he spake of him” (John 12:37-41). Paul applies the verse to the failure of the Jews to hearken to the glad tidings preached by the apostles (Rom. 10:16-21). The *message* is identified as the messianic message from God through Isaiah, Jesus, and the apostles that was generally rejected by the people. *The arm of Jehovah* is a metonymy for the power of God that is revealed in the message and that is exercised in the salvation that results from believing it (cf. 51:5; 52:10). By both word and power God revealed Himself and the salvation He would provide (1).

So certain is Isaiah of what will be done that he speaks of coming events in the past tense. They are as if already accomplished: *For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.* The Servant will grow up in the constant care and presence of Jehovah (cf. John 8:29). The *dry ground* out of which he will grow is the fallen lot of the house of David. The Edomite Herod, whose ancestors were enemies of God’s people, was on the throne of Judah, and Rome ruled over him. The priesthood was corrupt, greatly influenced by the Sadducean philosophy of unbelief, and the people were bound by tradition instead of committed to truth. Out of such a dry political, religious, and moral desert, God will make a twig, “a dry tree” according to Ezekiel (Ezek. 17:22-24), to flourish. Horribly disfigured by the treatment at his trials and the crucifixion, he will be repulsive to look upon. There will be *no beauty*. No regal adornments such as the people desire, but only an unimposing peasant carpenter from a small obscure village in Galilee. He will have none of the human glory that men look for and desire (2).

As a man humble in background and unimpressive by the world's standards, *he was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not.* To despise is to ascribe little worth to someone or something, to hold in contempt, as Esau despised his birthright and sold it for a mess of pottage (Gen. 25:34). The grief with which the Servant was acquainted was not his own, but the spiritual condition of the human race, the fruit of their sin (cf. 1:4-6). This caused the Servant deep concern and mental anguish, sorrow of soul under which he groaned with grief. Men, calloused by sin and steeped in their own iniquities, despised such a tender and holy spirit, failing to see in him the true Servant of God who could life them to solid spiritual health and right relationship with their Creator. Doing nothing but good, he came to save God's people, but they repaid him by doing nothing but evil and bad. We, the nation, even all men esteemed him not; all failed to see the spiritual beauty of his life and teaching and therefore failed to set a proper value upon him. How blind man must be not to have recognized then, or to recognize even now, the greatest Benefactor and Benefit ever offered by God to the human family (3).

Ch. 53:4-6 – The Servant's Vicarious Suffering

In the Hebrew the pronouns are emphatic – *surely they were our griefs which he bore.* Having spoken of the Servant's humiliation (2, 3), Isaiah hastens to declare the reason for it. Twelve times over within the space of nine verses he asserts with the most emphatic reiteration that all the Servant's sufferings were vicarious, borne for mankind, to save mankind from the consequences of his sins, to enable him to escape punishment. This doctrine from the Old Testament is set forth with equal distinctness in the New – Matt. 20:28; John 11:50-52; Rom. 3:25; 5:6-8; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 8:9; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:24, etc. – and forms the hope, the trust, and the consolation of Christians. The application that Matthew makes of this passage to our Lord's miracles of healing (8:17) is certainly not the primary sense of the words, but may be regarded as a secondary application of them. Christ's sufferings were the remedy for all the ills that flesh is heir to. The servant willingly took these burdens upon himself, but because of his painful sufferings and afflictions, his sorrows and acquaintance with grief, the people regarded him as smitten by the Lord, punished for his own sins.

The Servant was smitten by God, but only in the sense that God permitted him to suffer. God provided him as an offering, a sacrifice for man's sins. Little did the people realize that he was being subjected to such indignities for their sins, not his own (4).

Verse 5 corrects the misconception and contains further evidence of the great truth that all of Christ's sufferings were for us, and constituted the basis of salvation from sin. The form is varied but the truth is one. Christ was **wounded** or **pierced for our iniquities**¹ 1) by the **thorns**; 2) by the **nails**; and 3) by the **spear**. The wounds inflicted by the nails caused his death. He was **bruised**, or **crushed** (comp. *e.g.*, 3:15; 19:10; 57:15; Psa. 72:4). The **chastisement of our peace** was upon him, *i.e.* the chastisement that brought us peace, that brought an end to the enmity between fallen man and an offended God, that made them once more at one (Eph. 2:15-17). **With his stripes we are (were) healed** (comp 1 Peter 2:24). In addition to the blows inflicted on him with the hand (Matt. 26:27) and with the reed (Matt. 27:30), our Lord was judicially scourged (Matt. 27:26). Such scourging would have left the stripes by which we are healed (5).

Why was all of this vicarious suffering and grief necessary? **All we like sheep had gone astray**. This may be a reference to the entire nation of Israel that went astray before ever reaching the promised land. It may also refer to the entire race of mankind that needed atonement and redemption. The truth is that it applies to every accountable person who ever lived. Isaiah defines what he means by "gone astray": **We have turned every one to his own way**. This does not mean just a few. Collectively and individually, the whole world had sinned. There was "none that did good" absolutely. "No, not one" (Psa. 14:3). All had abandoned "the way of Jehovah" (40:3) to walk in their "own ways (66:3). In all of this **the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all**.

1. Our "iniquities" are our acts of rebellion against God's authority and law. Such acts bring a separation or breach between man and God. Such acts must be either punished or pardoned. In bearing the guilt of man's sins, the Servant also bore the punishment for them. The punishment for sin is eternal separation from God (2 Thess. 1:9). Jesus suffered this very punishment (though not eternally) on the cross (Psa. 22:1; Matt. 27:46; cf. also Eph. 2:14-18; 1 Peter 2:21-25).

Literally, *the Lord caused to light upon him*. God the Father lays upon the son the burden that the Son voluntarily accepts. He comes into the world to do his Father's will. He prays to the Father, "Let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, *but as thou wilt*" (Matt. 26:39). The cup could not pass because the Father "sent the Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Thus, if there was to be salvation for mankind's salvation, the iniquity of us all must be laid upon him. How wonderful! How marvelous! The redemption is as universal as the sin if man will only turn from his evil way to walk in the obedience of faith in the will and way of God (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

Ch. 53:7-9 – Total Submission of the Servant

The suffering, death, and burial of the Servant are foretold in these verses. **He was oppressed**. This surely included all of the ill treatment that a tyrant would inflict upon a captive (cf. 9:4; 14:3-4), **yet when he was afflicted**, suffering the physical and inner pain to which he willingly submitted for others, **he opened not his mouth**. As a lamb that is slaughtered or a sheep that is shorn remains silent,² so did the Servant react to his tormentors. When he was accused by the chief priests and questioned by Pilate, "he gave [them] no answer, not even to one word" (Matt. 27:1-14). When he was questioned by Herod, "he answered him nothing (Luke 23:9). The references in the New Testament to the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36) spring from this passage in the book of Isaiah (7).

The unfair judicial treatment of the Servant is foreseen. *By "From," margin) oppression and judgment he was taken away*. This describes a violence that cloaked itself under the formalities of a legal process. The Septuagint Version, which is quoted by Philip in Acts (ch. 8:33), must have been derived from quite a different text. It preserves, however, the right rendering of the verb, "was he taken away," *i.e.* removed from the earth. Delitzsch explains, "Hostile oppression and judicial persecution were the circumstances out of which he was carried away by death." Young states, "It is best to

2. This is the second reference to sheep, the first to man and this one to the Servant. What a difference! The first compares man to the propensity of the sheep to stray from the safety of the shepherd. The second compares the Servant to the sheep going quietly to be shorn or slaughtered.

understand **he was taken** as referring to being taken away by death from an unjust trial. This is supported by the parallel **he was cut off out of the land of the living** cf. Prov. 24:11). From the midst of his suffering he was taken away by death.” Pilate’s verdict of innocent, which he repeated three times (John 18:38; 19:4, 6), was in effect reversed when he washed his hands and delivered Jesus unto the Jews to be crucified (John 19:16). Who among those living at the time of his crucifixion had any idea that his death was for the transgressions of God’s people, **to whom the stroke was due**. The people of his generation saw him as a blasphemer deserving of death. In fact, in view of his life and theirs, they should have realized that they themselves were worthy of death and that he was the Servant who came to reveal God and his redemptive love (8).

Having revealed the violent nature of the Servant’s death, Isaiah turns to the Servant’s burial. **And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death**. Barnes interprets the passage, “And his grave was appointed with the wicked; but he was a rich man in his death.” The thought is that although it was intended that he be buried with the wicked – either with his cross according to Roman custom or at an ignominious site according to Jewish custom – he was instead buried in the tomb of a rich man. Delitzsch concurs: “The assigned him his grave with criminals, and after he had actually dies a martyr’s death, with a rich man.” Jehovah could by his providence prevent his beloved Servant from experiencing ignominious burial. The prophecy was fulfilled in the request of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathaea that the body be given to him for burial. Pilate granted the request and thus provided a burial with dignity in a new tomb (Matt. 27:57-60). Christ’s life was ever above reproach, his speech always

3. The Hebrew word translated “cut off” is always used of a violent death. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* comments on its usage: “The verb describes the division of an object into parts (1 Kgs 3:25; 2 Kgs 6:4) and even the chewing of food (Isa 9:19). When followed by the preposition ׀ (from) it connotes a violent severance from a former way of life. The cutting off might be from the fold (Hab 3:17), worship (2 Chr 26:21), the protective care of God (Ps 88:5 [H 6]), or life itself (Isa 53:8). The Niphal without the preposition refers more generally to death or destruction (Ezek 37:11; Lam 3:54). In Est 2:1 and Job 22:28 the verb has the connotation common in Aramaic, of making a pronouncement; cf. our English word “decide” from the Latin, “to cut off from.”

sincere and true. He had done no criminal act and had not failed in his work and mission. Therefore, his Father saw to it that the faithful Servant received an honorable burial.