

The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications

The meaning of...

SUFFERING SERVANT

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you to read the references given. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

Read: Isaiah 52:13-15

The prophet Isaiah lived a long time ago. He spoke God's word to Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah may have been a prince in the royal court before God called him to be His prophet. Some think he was the grandson of King Joash and a cousin of King Uzziah, also called Amaziah (2 Kings 14:3).

Isaiah was born at a time in Israel's history when only a remnant of the people worshipped the true God. His father Amoz called his son by a godly name which tells us that Amoz loved God and worshipped Him only. The name Isaiah means 'salvation is from the Lord,' the living God.

Isaiah grew up in the reign of King Uzziah who reigned in Jerusalem for 52 years. He outlived three kings who reigned after King Uzziah. Uzziah had been a good King. There was peace and plenty in Judah.

The prophet Zechariah taught the King "the fear of God" (2 Chronicles 26:3-5), so that King Uzziah loved God and "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord." Because of this, God prospered King Uzziah and the people of Judah (2 Chronicles 26:4).

In the year King Uzziah died (740 BC), God called Isaiah to be His 'voice' in Judah. At that time, Israel was divided with the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the southern kingdom of Judah.

God gave Isaiah many visions and warnings to speak to the people of Judah and some to speak against Judah's enemies.

A scribe wrote down Isaiah's visions and prophecies. The messages are mixed and hard to sort out. Some think chapters 40-66 were written later, just before the fall of Babylon (539 BC). They are some of the most vivid and precious in the whole Book of Isaiah (study chapter 53).

In the New Testament Isaiah's words are quoted more often than those of any other prophet. Jesus often used words spoken by Isaiah!

TALK ABOUT

1. Who was Isaiah?
2. Did he come to warn the people of God's judgment?
3. Did God tell Isaiah that the people would not listen to him?

PUNISHMENT FOR DISOBEDIENCE

Because the kings of Israel and Judah and the people did not obey the Lord God, the judgments spoken by Isaiah fell on Israel first and later on Judah (1:4). And we believe that the judgments Isaiah warned were coming upon them are the same as those Paul noted in his second letter to the Corinthians and continue to this day (2 Cor 3:14-17).

God's words to His prophet must have left Isaiah very discouraged. God said to Isaiah, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing and never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving; Make the heart of this people calloused (hard); make their ears dull and close their eyes....'"

Then Isaiah said, "For how long O Lord?"

And He answered, "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken" (Isaiah 6:9-12).

PROPHESIES OF A RIGHTEOUS RULER

Isaiah, more than any other prophet, saw beyond the captivity in Babylon, to the coming of Israel's Messiah. Under many different symbols, He prophesied that a mighty One would come and rule in righteousness.

Isaiah's greatest prophecies pointed to Messiah Christ. Jesus Christ was born seven hundred years later. He was the "Branch of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:1; 53:2). Some believe the Branch was Judah. Jesus Christ is shown as the hope of Israel and the hope of all mankind. While some prophecies were fulfilled soon after they were given, others were not fulfilled until Jesus Christ came to live among us and die on the cross.

There would always be a few true believers in the earth. The faithful 'survivors in Judah' were a picture of the Christian Church. They are "recorded among the living" in the Lamb's Book of Life, made pure by fire and called holy. They would be fruitful, and give God pleasure (Isaiah 4:3; Philippians 1:11).

God's people will be refined and made pure by passing through the fires of testing (Isaiah 4:4; Luke 12:49). Here they are called 'Jerusalem' and 'Zion'.

God "washes away the filth" of Zion or burns it away by His judgments. He sits like a refiner of silver and does not take us out of the flame until all the dirt and impurities are burned up (Malachi 3:2-3). Scripture calls God's refining work "a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire" (Hebrews 12:29). He will make His children clean as they yield to Him. The Christian Church knows little of this baptism of fire which Jesus promised (Matt 3:11)!

A 'Refiner' is a workman who deals with precious metals like gold and silver, when the precious metal is dug out of the earth there are many impurities in it, things that we don't want. He puts the mixture into a pot over a hot fire, the metal then melts and sinks to the bottom and all the dirt floats to the top where it is taken off and thrown away - only the purified metal remains. God is like this with us, there are many bad things He wants to remove from our lives so that we can be pure and holy. It is not a real fire but He teaches us in many ways and sometimes these ways can be hard to bear unless you trust God to know what is best for you.

TALK ABOUT

1. What does a 'Refiner' do?
2. How would God be like a Refiner?
3. Are you passing through the fires of testing?
4. Did you feel God near at those times?

REFINING FIRES

Revival comes when the Church passes through the 'refining fire' of God's cleansing. We are made clean when His Holy Spirit points out our sin and we repent.

God would use Judah's exile in Babylon to refine them (Jeremiah 9:7), to take the idolatry from their hearts. God is not cruel or unjust, but merciful to all who love Him. God hates sin and wants a holy people. He will do what He has to do to make them holy in this life!

God will refine His Church and make it 'spotless' (Isaiah 4:4; Ephesians 5:26-27). No unclean person will enter the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:8). He will protect His Church "from the heat of the day...from the storm and rain", and all who belong to it (Isaiah 4:5-6). His Servant will accomplish these things in His people.

SERVANT OF THE LORD

Isaiah wrote several "Servant Songs". The theme of the first Servant Song was 'conquest through suffering' (John 12:32). This is the second Servant Song (Isaiah 52:16 to

53:12). The theme of this Song is conquest or victory through service to others (John 13:2-16). A servant suggests a person of lowly place, but here it is a title of honour. One day God will honour all those who have served Him.

God called Israel to be His servant to other peoples. They thought only of themselves and did not consider the heathen around them. They did not make the Lord's name known in all the earth. They did not take His name to their neighbours.

A Greater Servant must arise! And all the world would know the Redeemer of Israel (Matthew 24:14). Earlier, Isaiah had pointed to this Servant, Jesus Christ (Isaiah 42:1-4). Jesus came to suffer and die for all mankind. His reward and glory would be seen in the Christian Church (Isaiah 49:4).

The return of the exiles to Jerusalem would be wonderful, but it was only a signpost pointing to the Saviour, Jesus Christ (Isaiah 49:1-3). His gospel would go to the ends of the earth. He would bring back those in Israel who had been faithful (the remnant), and He would add greatly to their number (49:7,24).

TALK ABOUT

1. Who was God's Servant Son?
2. Why did God send Him to earth?
3. Was Israel a faithful servant to the heathen nations?

THE SERVANT SON

God sent the Son:

1. "To restore the sons of Jacob."
2. To bring back "those of Israel I have kept."
3. "To be a light for the Gentiles."
4. "To bring My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6; Luke 2:32).

Because "those who hope in Me will not be disappointed" (Isaiah 49:23).

Only God could keep the remnant safe in Babylon and reach out to those who still doubted. In Jesus Christ, God reached out to the whole world (Matthew 12:18-21). No one can enter heaven without a personal faith in the "the Redeemer (Christ), the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 49:7). He came to Israel at the time of God's favour (Isaiah 61:2; 2 Corinthians 6:2), and He did everything God had promised.

"In the time of God's favour" (Isaiah 49:8), looked back to the Year of Jubilee in Israel (Isaiah 61:1-2; Lev 25:10). These words also looked forward to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. It would be like a 'Jubilee Year,' when land was given back to those who had title to it.

The gospel tells of God's grace and favour toward both Jew and Gentile. Paul declared, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

The prophet tells of the glories of God's Kingdom. Those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ "will neither hunger nor thirst, nor sorrow nor cry" (Isaiah 49:10-12; Rev 21:1-6).

CHRIST CAME TO REDEEM MANKIND

Christ's mission was first to the nation of Israel, then to the rest of the world. It will not be repeated. He came to "bring back Jacob... and gather Israel to Himself." His purpose was not to gather His people to any place on earth, but to their heavenly home! (Isaiah 49:5). At His second coming He will gather the Christian Church (Jacob or the Israel of God). They will be like the sand upon the seashore for number (Genesis 22:17; Romans 9:27).

But first He must suffer and die. This aspect of the Servant puzzled the prophets. "This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward." (1 Peter 1:10-11 TLB).

It was not the prophets who predicted the suffering of Christ, it was the Holy Spirit who moved their thoughts and pens.

Read: Isaiah 53:1-12

HE CAME TO DIE

Jesus Christ was born to die. Isaiah spoke of it when he wrote, "He (the Servant) was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people He was smitten. He was assigned a grave with the wicked...though He had done no violence nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (Isaiah 53:8-9).

"Who has believed the message?" Isaiah asked. Who would receive the divine messenger? The Apostle John said this prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus' own people refused His message (John 12:37-38).

Isaiah reported this in his message to the people (Isaiah 52:13-15). But no one believed his message. This made the prophet cry out, "Who has believed our message...?"

THE SERVANT'S PUBLIC MINISTRY

Isaiah told the Christ's public ministry (Isaiah 52:15). He began it in Galilee with the words, "The time has come," He said, "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). The Servant pointed men and women to His Kingdom.. Christ is the only worthy One. He is the rightful owner of the name 'Israel,' which means 'a prince with God.' He gives that name to all who love Him.

The "year of the Lord's favour" also looked to the time when the gospel would be preached and men and women would be brought back to their Creator (2 Corinthians 6:2). Jesus Christ preached this "good news" (Mark 1:15) and He told His disciples to preach the same good news that He had come and died! We must go on preaching His gospel until every people group has heard the good news (Isaiah 49:22; Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20).

HE WOULD SPRINKLE MANY NATIONS

Some believe this points to the sprinkling of baptism by the apostles and those who came after them. But we would rather see this as a reference to "the sprinkling by His blood" which washed away the sins of those who came into His Kingdom (1 Peter 1:2).

Kings would not open their mouths against Him, as they had done before. They would receive His words and, those things that had been hidden from them would be revealed. Those who looked for a great hero who would lead the people of Israel to victory against the Romans would be disappointed. But those who looked for the Suffering Servant "who takes away the sins of the world" would gladly acknowledge Him and be partakers of His divine nature and eternal glory (John 1:29; 2 Peter 1:4).

TALK ABOUT

1. What will God's Kingdom be like?
2. Who was the 'great Servant' of men?
3. What are Christians told to do (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)?
4. Who is the 'Servant of the Lord' here (Isaiah 49:3)?
5. Tell three things about the Servant's character?
6. What was His mission (Isaiah 49:6)?
7. God was ready to 'restore the land' to the Jewish captives. What must they do (49:9)?
8. What three names does God give Himself (Isaiah 49:26)?
9. What did Jesus tell His disciples to do (Matthew 28:19)?
10. What did Isaiah mean by "taking plunder from warriors" (Isaiah 49:24 NIV)?

THE PERFECT SERVANT

The first Servant Song (Isaiah 42:1-4) and the fourth (Isaiah 52:13- 53:12) point us to Messiah-Christ and His humanity. Philip the evangelist explained the meaning of this fourth Servant Song to the official returning to Ethiopia (Acts 8:34-35).

Only Christ the perfect Servant could:

- a) Lay aside His majesty and glory and come to earth as a helpless baby (Hebrews 2:9).
- b) Take upon Him a human body and suffer as a man (John 12:24).
- c) Lay down His own will and obey the Father's will (John 6:38; Heb 10:7).
- d) Live without sin (Heb 4:15).
- e) Die to bear away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

"He grew up like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground" (53:2). He came from the royal line of David, which had sunk so low and had become 'very dry ground.'

Isaiah prophesied that the Gentiles would receive the gospel and that most of the Jews would not. Jesus was "despised and rejected by men..." (John 1:11).

THE SUFFERING SERVANT

The prophet paints the picture of a suffering Messiah. "He was smitten and afflicted..." (Isaiah 53:4) Few Jews wanted to believe their Messiah would suffer so. Fewer still received the prophet's words.

"And by His wounds we are healed..." (Isaiah 53:5). Those possessed by demons were brought to Jesus. He drove out the evil spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This fulfilled what Isaiah wrote (53:5; Matthew 8:17).

The whole world is lost in sin. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray..." and become lost (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23). We are all lost from Christ until we hear the good news of the gospel and the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts (Luke 15: Hebrews 13:20).

Jesus paid the full price to redeem us from sin. He was condemned to die, yet He did not 'open His mouth' to defend Himself (Isaiah 53:7). He was led away to His death like a criminal and hung on a cross between two criminals.

"He was cut off from the land of the living..." and was "assigned a grave with the wicked..." (53:8-9). Death cut Him off at the young age of 33 years. Jesus had no physical children, but the Father promised Him spiritual children - children of faith. Christ "bore their iniquities and justified many" (Isaiah 53:11).

Joseph, a rich man, and Nicodemus, a ruler in Israel, asked for Christ's dead body (John 19:38-42). They laid His body in Joseph's tomb - a rich man's grave (Isaiah 53:9).

TALK ABOUT

1. Tell three things the Son of God did when He came to earth?
2. Why does the Bible say "we all, like sheep, have gone astray" (53:6)?
3. How was God's Servant 'cut off' from among the living?

THE MEANING OF HIS SUFFERINGS

Many asked: 'Why did God's Servant-Son suffer so? What evil had He done?' The prophets searched to find an answer (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Isaiah replied, "It was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer..." (53:10). Why? Because He must be 'a guilt offering,' a perfect sacrifice made for our sins and in our place (Leviticus 5:16).

God took our sins and sorrows and put them on Jesus. Christ's punishment brought us peace; His death brought us healing. It was the Lord's will; it was the Son's will! (53:10). God's ways are higher than our ways and past our understanding (55:8-9).

"Bearing pain and scoffing rude
In my place condemned He stood
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!" P.P. Bliss

OUR SINS WERE LAID ON JESUS

The lines of an old hymn say it best:

“There was One who was willing to die in my stead
That a soul so unworthy might live.
All the way to the cross He was willing to tread,
All the sins of my life to forgive.”

Only Almighty God had power to lay our sins on Jesus, and only Messiah-Christ had power to bear them to the cross. The strokes of the rod (whip) that fell upon Him should have been upon us! (Mark 14:65). The ‘wages’ of our sins is death (Rom 6:23)!

Three days after Christ died He rose again from the tomb. He saw ‘the light of life’ (53:11). The sacrifice of Himself put an end to all blood sacrifices and opened heaven’s door so that men could come freely to God (Heb 4:16).

Even at that moment, Christ saw those He had justified coming into His Kingdom “out of every tribe, tongue and nation and He was satisfied” (53:11; Revelation 7:9). They are the ‘spoils’ of His victory!

“Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). Christ is our altar, our sacrifice, our High Priest and our coming King.

TALK ABOUT

1. Why did Jesus have to suffer and die?
2. Who did God use to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy in 53:9 (Matt 27:57-60)?
3. What did Isaiah mean by Christ’s ‘offspring’ (53:10)?
4. Will you be one of His precious ones when He comes to gather His own? What a wonderful Saviour. Let us praise His holy name.

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