



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 52:13-15

“The Astonishing Messiah”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our theme in our series of messages is the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah, and today we are turning to Isaiah chapter 52 verse 13 through verse 15 and our subject is the astonishing Messiah. I hope you have your Bibles with you, and if you do, turn with me then to Isaiah 52 verse 13 through verse 15. And will you listen as I read these verses?

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. As many were astonished at thee, His visage was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men; so shall He sprinkle many nations. The kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them shall they see, and what they had not heard shall they consider.”

The astonishing Messiah. The most critical problem of life is not the universal prevalence of war nor the increasing violence of our age, nor the rampant immorality and license of our sex mad twentieth century. Nor is it the problem of AIDS or pornography or energy or inflation, it is not the problem of divorce or the increasing manifestations of materialism and avarice; it's the age old moral problem how can a just God declare sinful

man righteous? And in this great prophecy in Isaiah chapter 52 verse 13 through chapter 53 verse 12 the prophet, speaking of the servant of God who is to come rings the changes on how it is possible for a just God to declare sinful man righteous. The Prophet Isaiah has been called the Old Testament evangelist. And this particular prophecy has been called the golden passion of the Old Testament evangelist. In fact it has also been called the Mount Everest of Messianic prophecy. It surely is one of the great passages of the Old Testament of the coming Messiah. It sets forth the key to the problem of the suffering Messiah or the suffering servant of Jehovah in the words that the prophet writes here.

But who is this servant? Scholarship has offered not a few answers of which there are three leading ones. You know it has been said that tradition says that Isaiah was sawn asunder. Well, whether he was sawn asunder physically or not we are not absolutely certain, but one thing is sure, modern critics have sought to saw asunder his prophecies of the coming of the Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ. There are three leading interpretations of Isaiah 52 verse 13 through chapter 53 and verse 12, and first of all it has been said by some that the servant is the nation Israel. This is the view of many of the latter rabbis, both the circumcised rabbis, that is the Jewish rabbis and the uncircumcised rabbis that is Gentile students of this great prophecy.

But if Israel is intended, then these things must be true. Israel must have been an innocent sufferer. But when one reads the prophecy through, reading passages like Isaiah 53 and verse 8 or chapter 1 and verse 4 especially and Isaiah 42: 19 and 24, it's quite obvious that Isaiah did not regard the nation as an innocent sufferer. Israel if this is a prophecy of them must have been a voluntary sufferer also. But when one looks at the history of Israel and the history of Israel even as alluded to in this chapter, its future in its exile was surely not a voluntary sufferer. But most of all, this prophecy states that the servant is to make a substitutionary atonement for others. In fact, substitution is set forth many times in verses 4 through 8 and 10 through 12. And if it is true that

the servant is the nation Israel and if there is some conviction with regard to it then why has the synagogue omitted the reading of Isaiah 53 from the Scripture readings? Why has it been called the torture chamber of the Rabbis?

Many Jewish interpreters have also and some Gentiles too no doubt, have turned to a different interpretation and that is that the servant of Jehovah is a man, a leper perhaps or a martyr such as Isaiah himself. One of the finest of the Jewish interpreters Harry Olinisky has suggested that the suffering servant is the prophet Isaiah himself. But when one reads Isaiah's prophecy and reads the things that he says about himself, it's quite evident that he did not regard himself as an innocent sufferer. Listen to what he says of himself in chapter 6 and verse 5, “Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

There is really only one interpretation that satisfies the requirement of the context of this great passage, and it is that the suffering servant of Jehovah is the Messiah the God man the Lord Jesus Christ. There is strong support raised for this from many angles. In the first place, it was the view of the ancient rabbis that this passage had reference to the Messiah though of course the ancient rabbis did not refer this to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the view of the Jewish paraphrase or the Targum. In chapter 52 in verse 13, the Targum reads, “Behold my servant the Messiah.” So it's obvious that that particular paraphrase interpreted this passage of the Messiah to come. That's the view of many of the Midrashim and many of the late rabbis as well.

The view of the New Testament is without controversy, the passage refers solely to the Lord Jesus Christ. As Mr. Spurgeon used to say, “If the man of Nazareth, the Son of God be not right visible in these three verses, they are dark as midnight.” But our Lord settles the question for believing students of the Scriptures. In Luke chapter 22 and verse 37 we read these words, words that come from our Lord himself. The Lord Jesus is speaking and he says, “But I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be

accomplished in me and he was reckoned among the transgressors for the things concerning me have an end.” That’s a citation from Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 12 and the Lord Jesus himself said that it has to do with things concerning me. So for a believing man who looks at this passage there then can be no question but that this passage is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ the Messiah of Israel.

Now let’s take a look at it and in the opening verse, verse 13 chapter 52, we have Messiah’s exaltation, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.” The preceding context pictures the departure of the nation from Babylon. Notice verse 12, and here is one who will make it possible. As you read through this great prophecy, through the fifteen verses, the three that we’re looking at in chapter 52 and the twelve of chapter 53, it’s easy to see that the prophecy is a prophecy of five strophes of three verses each. And remarkably, these verses increase in length as the strophes continue. It’s almost as if the thought sweeps forward with fuller, more resistless volume as the prophet gives the prophecy.

One of the other striking things about it is that the first words of each of the strophes summarize and entitle each of the three verses. For example here in verse 13 of chapter 52, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently,” that in itself expresses the theme of the three verses beginning with verse 13 and concluding with verse 15. “Behold my servant,” God is speaking through the prophet, and this is his *ecce homo*. Behold the man! He is called my servant, that’s a title as honorable as it is condescending; he’s the person who conducts the affairs of the household of God. In fact, the term servant in this context is a term that suggests that he’s the representative of the Lord God the Father in heaven. And that of course is our Lord’s position as he carries out his atoning work. He acts representatively, under the direction of the Father in heaven, and for the benefit of those who are associated with him, his Covenant people. “My servant shall deal prudently.”

As one looks at the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ has carried out his ministry, one is convinced that amid the storms and tempests which surrounded him and which surround the church now left here to carry on the business of preaching the gospel in the present day, the storms and the tempests served only to illustrate the wisdom and power of our great pilot, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amid all of the storms and tempests which the church and which the individual members of the church face, one sees the wisdom and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's remarkable and it's certainly wonderful to know that he stands by us in all the experiences of life, the whole church and every individual member of that church who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“My servant shall deal prudently,” one thinks of the wisdom with which the Lord Jesus carried out his work. Always speaking in remarkable wisdom, even when attacked by others, even when pressed beyond that which any man could possibly stand, the Lord Jesus always spoke with speech that glorified the Lord God. And finally hanging upon the cross he finished the work which the father gave him to do. The captain triumphantly concludes by confirming the endless covenant in the shedding of his precious blood. He shall deal prudently, and how prudently has our Lord dealt?

Furthermore, the prophet says, “He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.” It is remarkable here that these three verbs, exalted, extolled and be very high are used of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. One thinks of 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 11 where Peter writes about the Scriptures and how he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. These three verbs in the Hebrew text have by many interpreters of this passage been claimed to be representative of three of the great ministries of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He shall be exalted, a verb *ya'ruum* -- that can mean “he shall rise,” and then extolled, *nasa*, which means something like “to lift up,” to bear away in many contexts, and then shall be very high, a verb that means essentially that. In fact, can it possibly be that these three verbs refer to the commencement of our Lord's exaltation in his

resurrection, the continuation of it in his ascension and the climax of it in his session at the right hand of the throne of God? He shall be exalted, he shall be extolled, he shall be very high. Even if we cannot prove that specifically these three acts are referred to, the great exaltation of the Lord Jesus is set forth in glorious terms here. Men may not think that the Lord Jesus is exalted today, but wait a while; the time is coming when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come from heaven and men shall see that he has been exalted all the time since his suffering on Calvary's cross.

Now in verse 14, the prophet speaks about his degradation. The sufferer is humanity's perplexity. Think of it, the Messiah actually a sufferer. “As many were astonished at thee, His visage was so marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men.” Notice the expression, “His visage was so marred more than any man,” the marvelous marring of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is striking that the church before the time of Constantine pictured to itself the Lord as he walked on earth as repulsive in his appearance. But then after the time of Constantine, they pictured him as having quite an ideal beauty. Actually, both were right, the Lord Jesus Christ may have been very unattractive in appearance though not deformed, he no doubt in the days of his flesh did not connote that which we might think of as handsomeness, but he was ideally beautiful in the moral glory of his person and beautiful in his glorification. The body in which he was born of Mary was no royal form though faith could see the glory of God shining through.

“He was so marred more than any man.” The chances are that this is a reference to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ and the things that he bore in the suffering. And consequently he bears the scars of the crown of thorns and the other means by which he was humiliated by the generation in which he found himself. But they are the things now that cause us to rejoice in him. The crown of thorns suggesting, since thorns were the symbol of the curse from the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, suggesting to us the fact

that he has born the curse of our sin and made it possible for us to be free by the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross.

Now verse 14 also states the effect, “As many were astonished at thee.” One can think of the many things which in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ were astonishing. Astonished by his lowly birth, who would ever have thought that the Messiah should come and be the son of a carpenter and should carry out the ministry of a carpenter, should be born in a lowly town such as Nazareth? “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” it was said. So the Lord Jesus was lowly in his birth, and no doubt astonishing. Some people could never get over the fact that the Messianic King was born in that lowly status, but oh what an insight that gives us into the character of God.

And then as one looks at his life, astonished by thirty years approximately of living an ordinary life, demonstrating in the experiences that he had the perfection of his character, in order that he might be the substitutionary sacrifice.

And then of course, astonishing in his death. To think that the Messiah must die – that was something that many could never get over, their minds were entirely caught up in the fact that the Messiah must be a magnificent king who should overcome the nations, never realizing that before the Messiah can do that, he must also pay the penalty for the sins of sinners and make it possible for them to enter into the blessings and to the glory of his work that he shall do when he comes the second time. Little did they realize that the prophecies set forth not simply one coming of the Messiah, but two. And the Lord Jesus has accomplished one and we await of course the second one.

So he was astonishing in his lowly birth, astonishing in his life, astonishing in his death, and of course, astonishing in his resurrection. One looks at Christianity and you certainly can see why Christianity has seemed to be foolish to those who do not understand their own nature and do not understand their need of an atoning sacrifice by which they may be delivered from their sins.

Atonement, so many people find it difficult to realize that there must be atonement. And even those who know that there must be atonement generally speak of theories of atonement and do not make much over the fact that the atoning work of Christ includes the satisfaction of the holiness and justice of God. There are different theories of the atonement, but we have to do with the fact and that is the important thing. “The frame of mind that says, there are several theories of the atonement but we have to do with the fact and not with our understanding of it, is the root of all that is most feeble and ominous in our churches today,” a famous theologian once said. The one thing we need is to understand the atonement with a life’s understanding, with a vital conscious. There in the atonement is where Christ comes to himself for good. There as it were, he finally finds his tongue and takes command of the deep eloquence of moral things. The Lord Jesus Christ is to us just what his cross is. You do not understand Christ until you understand his cross. You have not measured the moral world either because you see, if you cannot realize that there must be suffering for sin, you’ve not understood the moral world created by God. And if you do not understand that it is Christ the Son of God who has born sin and born it to the full by virtue of his divine personality and his true human nature, you have not understood Jesus Christ.

Now verse 15 concludes with Messiah’s manifestation. The prophet writes, “So shall He sprinkle many nations. The kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them shall they see, and what they had not heard shall they consider.” One reading these two verses notices immediately the relationship between the first part of verse 14 and the first part of verse 15. They’re related; in fact we have the *protheosis* in verse 14 and the *apotheosis* in verse 15. Let me read them that way, “Just as many were astonished at the, so shall he sprinkle many nations.

Now, interpreters debate the meaning of the Hebrew word *nasa* in verse 15, it may mean sprinkle, it may mean startle. And even our translations differ. Some of the translations have the word startle, the Revised Standard Version and the Greek translation



of the Old Testament. Others have sprinkle such as the King James Version and others like the New American Standard Bible. Let me say this, it is difficult to be absolutely sure of the rendering, either one makes good sense. Just as many were astonished at him at his First Coming, so shall he astonish many nations at his Second Coming in the future when they realize that the suffering Messiah is the coming and reigning King over this earth. If it means sprinkle then it means simply just as many were astonished at him at his lowly life, in a similar degree he will act as the atoning sacrifice for many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at him when they see his atoning significance in his First Coming. So either one of these renderings makes perfectly good sense, but the nations shall ultimately cry with the dying Julian the apostate, “Thou has conquered oh Galilean!”

Mr. Spurgeon said, “Oh thorn crowned king of Calvary, kings shall be their courtiers yet.” That’s true. He shall sprinkle many nations that is his atoning work shall be world wide, he shall startle them when they realize that the one they have crucified is the atoning Son of God, second person of the eternal Trinity. So the first strophe of Isaiah prophecy is over, they who stumbled at his First Coming are startled or sprinkled at his second.

There’s another side to this, chapter 49 and verse 7 the prophet writing about the suffering servant there says, “Princes shall worship.” And so let me conclude by asking you who are listening to me a question. How about you, do you worship him? Will you worship him? Will you acknowledge your sin and will you come to Christ who shed his blood that sinners may be saved? Believe in him, there are a thousand reasons why you should rush into his arms and say, “Oh incarnate Son of God, how can I possibly resist Thee?” Come to Christ; believe in him right at this very moment as you listen to these words over the radio. Next week we’ll look at verses 1 through 3 ...

**[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]**