



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Isaiah 53: 1-2

“The Misunderstood Messiah”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The theme of our present series of studies is the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah and as we turn to Isaiah chapter 53 verse 1 through 3 our subject today is the misunderstood Messiah. I hope you will get your Bibles and turn to Isaiah chapter 53 verse 1 through verse 3 as we look at the subject the misunderstood Messiah. The most critical problem of life is not universal prevalence of war nor the increasing violence of the age nor rampant immorality and the license that characterizes our sex mad twentieth century, it's not the generation gap and it's not the vision in the churches nor even the communist menace. It surely is not ignorance as the educator might think, or maladjustment as the psychologist might suggest, or meaningless in life as a philosopher might think, nor despair as the psychologist might offer. The real critical problem of life is the age old moral and spiritual problem, how can a just God declare unjust man righteous. Job wrestled with that, in chapter 9 in verse 2 and verse 20 and verse 30 through 33 of the 9th chapter of his book.

Isaiah the fifth evangelist as someone has called him who stood with his head in the clouds and his feet on the solid earth with his heart in the things of eternity and his mouth in the things of time, found the solution in the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. In fact, in this 53rd chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah he writes concerning the Suffering

Servant of Jehovah, in verse 11 and says, “He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied by his knowledge (or by the knowledge of him) shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.” God, the apostles and the evangelists through the Scriptures identified this individual who would justify many, the Suffering Servant of Jehovah as Jesus of Nazareth.

There is a wonderful story in the Book of Acts concerning the ministry of our Lord through Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. He was a man who had been convinced of monotheism. He had journeyed to Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of the Passover in order to worship the Lord there, hoping no doubt to gain a deeper knowledge of the relationship that one might have with the Lord God of heaven, Yahweh, or Jehovah. There no doubt, he had listened to the debates that had occurred with reference to the rise of this new sect of the Nazarenes. And as a result of that it seems he had secured for himself a copy of the Book of Isaiah who has been called the fifth evangelist. Where he got his manuscript I don't know, maybe there was a little bookstore called the Zion Book and Bible Store in the city of Jerusalem.

At any rate, he was returning home to Ethiopia and obviously had not found what he had been looking for in Jerusalem. He was reading the Scriptures and as he was reading the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit spake to Philip the evangelist and said to Philip, “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran to him, heard him reading the Prophet Isaiah, and asked him, understandest thou what thou readest? And he said how can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip (that is he urged Philip) that he would come up and sit with him. And the place of the scripture (Providentially we would say,) where he was reading was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. (Well we know those are verses from this same Isaiah chapter 53 verse 7

and verse 8.) The eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself, or of some other man? And Philip (we read) opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came to a certain place where water was and the eunuch said, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”

And he was baptized and as a result of that, made profession of his faith in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah finding on the way home in his chariot, through Philip the evangelist, that which he could not find in the feasts and the celebrations of the Passover in Jerusalem itself. Mr. Spurgeon used to say, “If the man of Nazareth the Son of God be not right visible in these verses, they are dark as midnight itself.” And with that we surely would agree. This great prophecy of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah that begins in chapter 52 in verse 13 and takes us on through chapter 53 is a prophecy of five strophes. And as the strophes unfold, they increase in words and volume almost as if the current flows even stronger as the prophet continues his marvelous unfolding of the gloriously successful career of the Messiah the New Testament reveals as the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course the glories that are set forth are set forth as coming only after suffering. And that too is in perfect harmony with the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This “Mount Everest of messianic prophecy” as Kyle Yates the well known Baptist professor and preacher called it is divided into five parts. In verses 13 through 15 of chapter 52 we have “The Suffering Messiah Successful.” And then in the verses we’re looking at in just a moment, “The suffering Messiah Misunderstood.” And then in verse 4 through verse 6 we have “The Suffering Messiah Substitutionary.” And finally, or rather next in verse 7 through verse 9, we have “The Suffering Messiah Submissive,” and finally, “The Suffering Messiah Foreordained,” verse 10 through verse 12.

Well we’re going to look today at verses 1 through 3, and will you listen as I read the complaint of unbelief that the nation offers in verse 1. Chapter 53 of Isaiah reads,

“Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” Now I want to make one point that I think is extremely important. In verse 1 through verse 9, contrary to the rendering in some of our versions, the verbs are set in past time. And so, what we have essentially is the future redeemed remnant as they look back over the past history of the nation, lamenting its past history, and specifically lamenting its unbelief at Messiah’s First Coming. In fact, what we have here is really the vocalization of what Zechariah writes about when he says in verse 10 of chapter 12 of his prophecy,

“And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first born.”

And so the nation of the future as it comes to a realization that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah, they look back over their past history and speak of their unbelief. And so we read,

“Who believed the report that we gave and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he had no form nor comeliness; and when we saw him, there was no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

And so the future redeemed remnant, seeing the fact that they have rejected the Messiah in the past, lament their unbelief. Now in the first verse which we read where the prophet expresses the complaint of unbelief, “Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” There is a remarkable affirmation of the fact

that the plainest teaching earnestly delivered is darkness for the unregenerate man. “Who has believed our report” or what we have heard? Now, it’s evident from this that he shows that few will believe, because of sublimity of the message and also the necessity of the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

“Who has believed what we have heard, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” The fact that he speaks of the arm of the Lord here is a reference to the work of Jehovah in humiliation and in the exaltation of the Messiah. So, the prophet then expresses the fact that even in the presence of the Lord God himself in their midst there was unbelief. One is reminded of Mrs. Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*, “Earth’s crammed with heaven and every common bush a fire with God, and only he who sees takes off his shoes, the rest sit ‘round it and pick blackberries.” That’s unfortunately what happened when the Lord Jesus came. Only a small remnant relatively responded to the message of the Messiah at his First Coming. And notice in verse 1, the use of the word revealed, “And to whom was the arm of the Lord revealed.” This refutes the ignorance of those who think that faith is in the power of every person. The work of the Holy Spirit in divine revelation is necessary for anyone to come to faith in Christ. Divine revelation, or as we like to call it, divine illumination, that’s the necessary work of God for the comprehension of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in the second verse, the prophet speaks of the course of Messiah’s life. And here is one of the greatest prophecies of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ being unfolded. Listen to it, “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he had no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there was no beauty that we should desire him.” A tender plant, the arm of Jehovah manifested itself not in a prince royal or a mighty philosopher, but a worthless shoot off of a branch. And of course, as the Scripture says here, there was no beauty that the men of his day desired him. When you look at the New Testament and you read of the way that Herod treated him, the way the Pharisees regarded him, the things that the scribes said about

him, the things that the people said, and Caiaphas the High Priest, and even his friends you can understand why we read, “He had no form nor comeliness and when we saw him, there was no beauty that we should desire him.” And yet, in spite of that, Isaiah writes “for he grew up before him as a tender plant.” Before the Lord God, things were entirely different.

He is described here as a root out of a dry ground, that is, this root derives nothing from the soil about it. Our Lord Jesus derived nothing from his natural descent. True, he was of the seed of David, the great king, but David’s tabernacle was fallen at this time. He was no Caesar’s son. As a matter of fact, the New Testament sets forth the Lord Jesus in the lowest way so far as his human background was concerned. This root derived nothing from his nationality. He was a Jew, an Israelite, not a Greek or a Roman, he was no David with a harp, he was no weeping Prophet Jeremiah, he was no Haggai, he was these individuals in our Lord’s day who were the descendents of the great prophets of the Old Testament were simply dribbling forth traditions, and so he was a root out of dry ground. The nationality contributed nothing to him other than to qualify him for the fulfillment of the prophetic word. He had nothing from his followers. He didn’t rush to Rome to gather the strong, he didn’t rush to Athens to gather the wise, he didn’t go to the forum to gather the worldly or to the aeropogus and the philosophers. To whom did he go to get his followers? Well, the common man, the fisherman of his day. And then he derived nothing from the means by which he overcame. He did not use the kinds of methods that men use even today. Not like the Muslim, he didn’t use the sharp argument of a scimitar or a sword or the violence of a bomb. He was no state churchman, he asked for no choir, and he had no special vestments in order to serve and impress the people of his time. He was a tender plant and a root out of a dry ground.

And in the statement that follows, we read “He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” So, the spiritual

beauty is the thing that characterized our Lord Jesus Christ, he had the insignia of the divine majesty but they were veiled in the carrying out of his ministry.

Then the prophet in the third verse goes on to say, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” If in verse 1 then we have the complaint of unbelief, and if in verse 2 we have the course of Messiah’s life set out in a remarkable way, then in verse 3, the stress rests upon the contempt of the nation. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus Christ was one who was despised and rejected of men, “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Despised and rejected of men. In the Old Testament it was stated in Isaiah chapter 49 and verse 7 in another of the prophecies of the servant of Jehovah, verse 7,

“Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his holy one, to him who man despiseth to him who the nation abhorth, to a servant of rulers, kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship because of the Lord that is faithful and the Holy One of Israel and he shall choose thee.”

Again, notice that stress upon the fact that he should be despised. In chapter 50 in verse 6, in the third of the prophecies of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah we read the servant saying, “I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, I hid not my face from shame and spitting.” So in verse 3 of Isaiah 53 when we read he was despised and rejected of men, then we have a true epitome of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

“Rejected of men,” the term that is used for men here is a term that suggests the rich and the influential, it’s the Hebrew word *eshim*, and not the word *adam*. And so to be rejected of men suggests that he was rejected by all of the influential and rich men of his day. “We will not have this man to rule over us,” they said.

And the prophet in one of the remarkable phrases of Isaiah 53 adds, “He was a man of sorrows.” A man, “That term man is one of those gospel church bells which must be rung every Sabbath Day,” Mr. Spurgeon used to say. In other words, we must have a redeemer who is one of us in order to be a redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ must not only be the Son of God, possessed of divine nature and the divine person, but he also must be one of us to stand for us. And so as we often put it theologically, man’s breach of the law of God must be repaired by a man. And the Lord Jesus Christ was truly a man apart from sin. As we often sing in our meetings, “Man of sorrows what a name for the Son of God who came.” The same one who made the seas and the heavens and was responsible for the creation of man himself was by the side of the well speaking to the Samaritan woman and saying, “Give me to drink.” So, the one who is man of sorrows is Lord of lords and King of kings.

“A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” that expression is a remarkable expression, and of course the prophet refers by imputation as well as by association when he says that he was acquainted with grief. He was acquainted with grief because of his association with men. And by imputation as well, the world was ever a wilderness life was one long Lent, and the Lord Jesus dwelt constantly by the bitter waters of Marah as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah who was acquainted with grief.

And finally, or the prophet continues I should say, we hid as it were our faces from him. So as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised. They said with reference to him, “Away with this man, we will not have this man to rule over us.” There is a remarkable passage, remarkable because of its manifestation of unbelief in one of the sermons of a liberal minister of a couple of decades ago. This man said in the sermon entitled, “The Peril of Worshipping Jesus,” “I think God was in my mother, the source of all loveliness that blessed us there, and I rise from that with a profound sense of the reality of what I am doing when I confess my faith that God was in Christ.” To think that he is saying that God was in Christ in the same way that God was in his mother. He also

said, “Of course the divinity of Jesus differs from ours in degree, but not in kind.” But the Lord Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God, and differs from us in moral glory, not in degree, but also in kind.

Now the prophet concludes in verse 3 of Isaiah 53 by saying, He was despised and we esteemed him not.” “We estimated him at nothing,” Luther says. In fact, they sold him for thirty pieces of silver, the price, I guess today, in our way of pricing things, not simply for a suit of clothes, but perhaps not more than a pair of slacks. The Apostle Peter, preaching in the city of Jerusalem in Acts chapter 3 and verse 12 through verse 15 makes these statements,

“Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.”

That is the fulfillment of that statement when he says, “We hid as it were our faces from him, he was despised and we esteemed him not,” estimated him at nothing, sold him for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a pair of slacks. We often sing, “Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” We call upon you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ to turn to him as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah and through the saving work that he accomplished in dying for sinners, receive him as your own personal Savior. Come to Christ, believe in him, receive eternal life through him.

Next week, our subject will be the vicarious ...

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