

The Suffering and Glory of God's Servant
Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Key Verse: 53:5

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Isaiah was born nearly 800 years before Christ. However, amazingly, he described the Messiah vividly: his birth, character, divine nature, ministry, suffering and glory. Isaiah's prophecies were all fulfilled through Jesus Christ. This shows us that Jesus came as the promised Messiah, as foretold by God long ago. When we read Isaiah 53 in light of the gospels, we think of Jesus. Many New Testament writers quoted this passage to explain the meaning of Jesus' life, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and Second Coming (Mt 8:16-17; Jn 12:37-38; Ac 8:32-35; Ro 10:16; 1 Pe 2:22-25). For example, in Acts 8, we meet an Ethiopian eunuch on his way home from worshiping God in Jerusalem. He was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah. The Holy Spirit sent Philip to him, who asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?" He was reading Isaiah 53:7-8. He asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Philip began, with that very passage of Scripture, and told him the good news about Jesus. The eunuch was greatly moved by Jesus' story and was baptized. He became the first Christian in Ethiopia; his nation became a Christian nation. This reveals the great impact Jesus' story can have on one person, and even on an entire nation. Through today's passage we can learn many things about Jesus, especially the meaning of his suffering and death. Some people have heard many times that Jesus died for their sins. But in reality, they do not have the assurance of forgiveness, because of wounds, bitterness, and guilt feelings that remain in their hearts. They have no peace or rest in their souls. Today, let's consider why Jesus suffered so much and died, and what kind of grace he gives us. Through this, may all the guilt feelings, wounds and bitterness be removed from our hearts so that we may have real peace and joy, and a sense of victory in this Easter season.

Today's passage can be divided into five sets of three verses. In 52:13-15 Isaiah introduces God's servant and his ministry generally. In chapter 53, Isaiah describes God's servant in detail: his birth, growth and ministry in verses 1-3, his suffering on the cross in verses 4-6, his unjust trial, death and burial in verses 7-9, and his resurrection and victory in verses 10-12.

First, God's servant acted wisely (52:13-15). Look at 52:13. "See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted." The verb "see" is often translated as, "behold." This means, "pay close attention to this." God wants us to pay attention to how his servant, Jesus, acted. There are many people who try to attract our attention, such as the presidential candidates, athletes, singers and dancers, and salesmen. But they are not really concerned about our happiness or our real problems. However, God wants our attention so that he may solve our real problem and give us true freedom, happiness and joy. So let's pay attention to what Jesus has done.

In order to carry out the work of world salvation, great wisdom was required. The problem of sin had to be resolved, while sinners needed to be saved. The difficulty is that both God's holiness and his love, his two great attributes, had to be satisfied. Let's see how Jesus acted wisely. Verse 13b says, "...he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted." This refers to Jesus' ultimate victory over sin and death. How did this victory come about? Verses 14-15a say, "Just as there were many who were appalled at him--his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness--so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him." Jesus was beaten, flogged and crucified like a criminal. Jesus' flesh was torn all over, and his blood splattered. When people saw this, they were appalled; they turned their faces away. Yet Jesus' crucifixion cleansed people from their sins. In this way, he sprinkled many nations with his blood. Then God raised this Jesus from the dead, lifted him up and highly exalted him. When kings--representatives of nations--saw this, they shut their mouths. Jesus' resurrection silences their arguments. Through his resurrection, Jesus became the King of kings and Lord of lords. God's wisdom was so profound that people were astounded by it. Jesus said, "The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Mt 21:42). God's servant succeeded in his task by acting wisely. Second, God's servant was despised (53:1-3). This part mainly talks about the birth, life and ministry of God's servant. Let's read verse 1. "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" What is "our message"? It is the message of the suffering and glory of the servant through which God saves

mankind from sin and death. This message was hard to believe. The words, "...the arm of the Lord," refer to God's servant and symbolize the power of God. God could have used his power to destroy people, if he wanted. However, God chose to use his power to save people. God exerted his power by sending his one and only Son into the world to suffer and die as a ransom for us. This is beyond our imagination. This message was so marvelous that people could not understand it by mere reason. How could the almighty God sacrifice his precious Son for those who only oppose him all the time due to their wickedness and pride? God did this because he loves sinners. It is an amazing mystery. The prophet Isaiah was deeply moved, and asked poetically and rhetorically, "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

Isaiah begins to share the contents of the message--the story of the servant, Jesus--in verse 2. It says, "He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." Artists' drawings usually render Jesus very handsome and strong. He has long hair, and seems to be tall. But Jesus' appearance was not so attractive. He had no beauty or majesty. He grew up like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground. However, this was not Jesus' original appearance. Jesus is the Eternal God through whom all things were made. At his transfiguration on a mountain, he revealed his glory and majesty. Jesus is worthy to receive all glory, honor and praise from all men all the time. However, Jesus did not come to us as a wise man, a rich man, or a powerful man, but as a helpless baby in a manger. Jesus grew up as the son of a poor carpenter. He lived in Galilee, a despised district at that time. People said, "Can anything good come from there?" (Jn 1:46) We usually consider appearance important for success. So we "dress for success" by wearing fine clothes and hairstyles, using cosmetics, and perhaps having plastic surgery. But Jesus had nothing in his appearance that would cause us to desire him. People try to obtain and hold power by any means. But Jesus gave up his power and privileges as God. He emptied himself and became nobody. Why did Jesus come in this way? It was to become the friend of all kinds of people. Jesus experienced the poverty, pains and suffering that we experience. So Jesus really understands us. Furthermore, anybody can come to Jesus freely, without feeling inferior due to their human condition.

How did people treat Jesus? Look at verse 3. "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem." The Israelites longed for a glorious Messiah like King David, who could save them from the Roman Empire. When Jesus came humbly as a carpenter's son, they despised and rejected him, holding him in low esteem. The Jewish religious leaders criticized Jesus, calling him "a friend of tax collectors and sinners," "a glutton and a drunkard," and "demon possessed." Even Jesus' hometown people rejected him. Jesus was a man of sorrow and familiar with grief. In this way Jesus became like one of us. When we are despised and rejected by people, it is very painful. Animals don't mind rejection, as long as they eat and sleep well. But human beings have a sense of honor that cannot be ignored. Yet when we want to learn of Jesus, we need to crucify our desire for recognition and honor. When we are despised and rejected because of Jesus, it is the opportunity to learn of Jesus more.

Third, God's Servant was pierced for our transgressions (53:4-6). This part mainly talks about Jesus' suffering on the cross. Look at verse 4a. "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...." Here "pain" comes from a Greek word, "kholee" that means sickness, illness or disease that is accompanied by pain. Some call our world the place of "survival of the fittest." Only the strong survive and become winners of life. The weak are trampled on and become losers of life. Often, the weak and sick are judged to be worthless. Yet everyone is weak sometime, in some way. Healthy people can be attacked by cancer and become too weak to care for themselves. In many cases, no one understands our sicknesses; nor are they able to care for our diseases. But Jesus took up our sicknesses and weaknesses. Matthew, the tax collector, was a talented person. But he became weak, due to his sin-sickness--especially his selfishness. He was despised by his own people and was suffering from loneliness. But he saw Jesus heal many sick people one by one. Then he was greatly moved by Jesus' messianic love and wrote, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases;'" it was Isaiah 53:4.

How did human beings see Jesus, who was taking up our pain? Verse 4b says, "...yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted." People did not understand why Jesus suffered so much and died on a cross.

They assumed that Jesus was being punished by God for his own wrongdoing. They did not connect Jesus' suffering to their sin. Jesus' suffering was irrelevant to their lives. They were like spectators. Yet Jesus was obtaining a great blessing for people through his suffering.

What blessing was Jesus gaining for us? Let's read verse 5. "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." When Jesus was tried, he was flogged repeatedly with a whip of leather strands that had lead bits embedded at their ends. Jesus was badly injured. As Jesus hung on the cross, a soldier pierced his side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. In addition to physical pain, Jesus bore the pain of abandonment. So he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46)

Why did Jesus suffer like this? He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. Transgressions are violations of God's law, which is rebellion. Iniquities refer to all kinds of dirty sin-sicknesses. Because of transgressions and iniquities we have no peace. They fill us with guilt and rob joy from our lives. They deeply wound our souls. Due to these wounds we are not healthy. We have great pains within us. We fall into habits and patterns that destroy ourselves, and wound others. Dr. Jerry Root compared wounded people to a record which has a deep scratch. Beautiful music should come from our lives, but the scratch repeatedly disturbs it. Wounds make people very bitter. Wounds spread and develop into fatal illnesses. How can we be healed from transgressions, iniquities and wounds? Some people drink alcohol until they pass out. Others abuse their bodies with drugs or immorality, or engage in escapist behavior through some kind of virtual reality. These things make people worse, not better.

However, when we come to Jesus, we find healing and restoration. Jesus took the punishment that our sins deserve so that we can have peace. Jesus took our wounds to give us healing. In Jesus we have peace and healing. We can live a happy and healthy life. Our relationship with God, and our peace of mind, and our relationships with others, can be restored. We are made new and become healthy through Jesus' grace. We don't need to live in misery because of our sins. Rather, we should come to Jesus and lay down our burdens at the cross. Jesus forgives our sins and heals us. What amazing grace! Thank you, Jesus, for enabling us to live healthy and happy lives. Peter experienced Jesus' healing grace. He had denied Jesus three times at the hour of Jesus' arrest and trial. He was wounded by his sin and suffered a lot. Whenever he saw a rooster, he remembered his failure. So he did not like chicken. But when he beheld the cross of Jesus, he received healing through Jesus' wounds. So he said, "He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds, you have been healed.'" (1 Pe 2:24).

Verse 6 begins, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...." Sheep are stupid, stubborn and foolish. Sheep are also helpless. People are like sheep in this respect. We live according to our own ways. It seems to be a kind of freedom. But we go astray and get into deep trouble, which we cannot get out of by our own strength. In reality, this kind of lifestyle brings pain, death and condemnation. Yet verse 6b says, "...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." God put all the sin-sickness of all his people upon Jesus, who bore them for us. Thus Jesus takes away all our iniquity. Why did God do this? It is because he loves us. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God's love is immeasurable.

Fourth, God's Servant was oppressed and cut off (53:7-9). This part mainly talks about Jesus' unjust trial, death and burial. Verse 7 says, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." Fallen men open their mouths and pour out their complaints at every opportunity. However, Jesus did not open his mouth when he was falsely accused. Cows shed tears, and pigs squeal loudly when they are led to the butcher. But like a sheep before her shearers, Jesus was silent. Why did Jesus not open his mouth? Through prayer in Gethsemane he had accepted God's will and decided to obey God absolutely. He did not need to say anything before men. Those who prayerfully obey God's will do not complain about injustice or mistreatment. They just follow God's leading silently. But those who are not obedient can complain a lot. Ironically, when people should have raised their voices against the injustice being done to Jesus, they remained silent. Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. Yet he allowed him to be

crucified. Finally, Jesus was cut off from the land of the living. This means that Jesus died. Then, "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death..." (9). Jesus was condemned as a criminal, yet he was buried in an expensive garden tomb, donated by Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus' burial has meaning. When Jesus was nailed to the cross and died, our sins were also nailed with him. When Jesus was buried, our sins were buried with him. Was death the end for Jesus? No. There was a glorious resurrection after his death.

Fifth, God's Servant sees the light of life (53:10-12). Verse 10 says, "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand." Jesus' death on the cross was the Lord's will. God's will was to give his Son as an offering for sin. God's justice has declared that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. God's justice had to be satisfied. Jesus, who gave himself as a sin offering, paid the full price of our sins, once for all. Jesus was like a kernel of wheat that fell to the ground and died, and produced many seeds.

Look at verse 10b. The words "...prolong his days," mean that Jesus rose again, conquered death and lives as the Eternal God. Verse 11a says, "After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied...." On the cross, Jesus had resurrection faith. He saw what God would accomplish through his death and resurrection and his soul was satisfied. Though Jesus died, he was not defeated by the power of death. Through his death, he destroyed the devil--who holds the power of death. Jesus won a great and eternal victory: Jesus conquered death and the devil. Though Jesus suffered so much and died, he had no regrets. His soul was satisfied by the fulfillment of God's will and he gave a shout of victory. Through Jesus' death so many people are justified. Jesus bore our iniquities. Because of Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we can have a right relationship with God.

Verse 12a says, "Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong...." God restored Jesus' original glory as the Son of God. God honored Jesus so that every tongue may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Many people think that death is the end of everything. This thinking can produce two lifestyles. One is hedonistic: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Such people seek pleasure as of first importance. The other is nihilistic: "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless." These people become fatalistic and may commit suicide. But death is not the end of our lives. After death, there is eternal judgment. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor 5:10). God will punish those who do evil and wicked things. God will also reward those who seek God and his glory and honor. Jesus bore our sins and died for our sins on the cross. Then God raised him as our Savior and Lord. Jesus became King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God and will come to judge the living and the dead.

Through today's passage we learn several things. First of all, we learn God's faithfulness to fulfill prophecy. Just after man's Fall, God prophesied that he would send an offspring from the woman who would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). It was a primitive gospel message. God began his redemptive work by calling one man, Abraham, promising, "...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:3). Throughout many generations, God prophesied through his servants that he would send the Messiah. People abandoned God and were rebellious against him. But God never cancelled his promise. God finally fulfilled his prophecy by sending his one and only Son Jesus. God fulfilled all the prophecies of Isaiah without fail. God is faithful. Because of God's faithfulness, we can be saved.

Secondly, we learn that glory comes from suffering. People like glory, but they don't like suffering. If possible, they want to obtain glory without suffering. Yet true glory comes from suffering. There are many kinds of suffering. People suffer because life is tough. People suffer from diseases, disasters, and so on. These kinds of sufferings seem to have no meaning. So many people suffer from meaninglessness. However, Jesus' suffering has great meaning. Through Jesus' suffering, our sins are forgiven, our wounds are healed, and we can be justified before God as his dear children. Through Jesus' suffering we can live a meaningful and victorious life. Now we can participate in Jesus' suffering. 1 Peter 2:21 says, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." If we suffer for doing good, it is commendable before God. At one

time, Peter avoided suffering by denying Jesus. After learning the meaning of Jesus' cross, he suffered for Christ willingly. He encouraged his fellow Christians to suffer, saying, "But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pe 4:13). Let's engage in the suffering of Christ willingly.

Thirdly, we learn God's love for all sinners. We are unlovable, for we are all transgressors and full of iniquities. We deserve to be punished by God. But God loved us so much that he punished his one and only Son in our place. He forgave all our sins and healed our wounds and sin-sickness so that we may be healthy and happy and live a fruitful life before God. True love is more than words; it requires evidence. God did not just say, "I love you." He made the great sacrifice of his one and only Son to give us life. We have clear evidence that God loves us. So we should not doubt God's love in any situation. When we feel good, or when we receive blessing, we say, "God loves me so much." But when we receive discipline or face disease or hardship, we easily complain and doubt God's love, saying, "Does God really love me?" Our understanding of God's love is very shallow and conditional. So we need to take root and grow in his love. Paul prayed for the Ephesians, "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:17b-19). When we grow in God's love we can live a victorious life. As Paul said in Romans 8:37, "...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Thank you, Father, for your great love for us. Thank you, Jesus, for obeying the Father's will to death to save us from our sins.