



MOUNTAIN BROOK
BAPTIST CHURCH

MEDITATIONS
O N T H E

SUFFERING
SERVANT



ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

"TIME TO LOOK UP"

Monday, April 6 | Isaiah 52:13-15 | Doug Dortch

Have you ever heard someone tell you to "look up"? That word of instruction is somewhat unique in that it can come our way either as a warning or as an encouragement. Our attention is either some place it doesn't need to be, or we can't see our way forward because of how something in our past has us down. Both situations merit a change in us, which a look upward in the right direction can make happen for the better.

The book of Isaiah contains such instructions that direct us to Jesus. Written about 600 years before Jesus' death on the cross, Isaiah's prophecy prepares us for the humiliation and anguish Jesus was to suffer on our behalf so that we might experience a deliverance only He could make possible.

The first word of Isaiah's message turns our gaze to Calvary. "See" is how some translations render it. "Behold" is how others interpret it. When I was serving as a pastor in south Alabama, people there had what I thought was a charming expression (and still do): "Look here!" Maybe it reminds me of my first reading lesson with Dick and Jane and how even as a young child I could already envision the possibilities before me by directing my attention in the right direction.

Unfortunately, Isaiah could see how when Jesus came, many would fail to recognize Him because of how His death would be the last thing they would have expected God's Messiah to have gone through. What is the old saying? "Appearances can be deceiving."

As we begin this most holy of weeks, fix your focus on Jesus, high and lifted up. Don't allow your attention to be misdirected on things that others may tell you are important but really don't amount to a hill of beans. And if you're discouraged over how nothing seems to have worked out as you thought it might, the cross assures us that hope springs eternal, even if it does so in a way no one would have guessed.

So, "look up!" Your redemption is drawing nigh and what Jesus promises to do is something none of us can afford to miss.

“WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS”

Tuesday, April 7 | Isaiah 53:1-3 | Amy Hirsch

Have you noticed that most artistic renderings of Jesus portray Him as physically fit with straight teeth? As a Middle Easterner, Jesus likely had a dark complexion and dark hair, but Isaiah's prophecy warns against depicting Jesus as a man who was particularly attractive. According to Isaiah 53, the Suffering Servant wasn't handsome, wealthy, or majestic. The prophets declared God would send a deliverer for His people, and the Jews had been waiting in expectation for God to intervene in their situation.

But perhaps they missed part of the memo. They were looking for a king who would come to rule, who would end their political oppression and overthrow their enemies. Maybe that's why Jesus didn't meet their expectations. They were waiting for God to roll up His proverbial sleeves and show His strength, to deliver them by His mighty right hand like when He had parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape from Egypt (Exodus 15:1-21). Rather than sending them a political king, God sent them a suffering servant, a man who seemed to be ... ordinary. So they turned their faces away, rejecting the one foretold by the prophets, the one sent by God to save them.

Perhaps they turned away from Jesus because He was unattractive, but there is more to the text. They despised this Man of Sorrows because He was acquainted with pain and suffering. Why did He repulse them? I believe they were disgusted because of their self-righteousness. Jesus knew sorrow because He took on their sorrows. He knew suffering because He took on their suffering. Yet they counted Him as weak, and His sacrifice as unnecessary, because they did not understand the weight of their sin. They were in denial about their need for a redeemer, so they were sickened by this man who declared that He came to die for their sins. They rejected Pilate's offer to release Jesus, crying instead, "Crucify Him!" They mocked Him as He walked the path to the cross. They turned their faces away as He was beaten, and scorned, and pierced for their sakes.

"ALL OF US"

Wednesday, April 8 | Isaiah 53:4-6 | Ben Winder

This middle day of Holy Week brings us to the middle stanza in the Suffering Servant poem. As we are halfway between Palm Sunday and Easter, so too in this stanza we find ourselves between two sets of pronouns. The third person singular "He" and the first-person plural "we". Him, the suffering servant alone; us, all of us, together in our sin.

There are some deeply profound truths in this Hebrew poem. Sin is universal and inescapable. Sin separates and scatters. Sin is essentially self-willed. There's certainly a part of us that knows and understands these truths about sin. At least conceptually we recognize the universality of human sinfulness and the universality of the offer of God's graceful salvation. Nonetheless, as we read this passage, we can find ourselves in the seat of the first readers asking, "Who is this 'we'?" and "Surely not us, Lord." There is a certain anonymity in the plural. We can miss that we are we. Verse six begins and ends the same way. We all ... we all. All of us ... all of us. If we will recognize that we are we, if each of us will allow ourselves to be read into these many first-person plural pronouns, as certainly the author intended, then we will see the terribly unfair juxtaposition of ourselves and the Suffering One.

He took our pain and bore our suffering. Despite what we thought, He has not suffered because God has inflicted His deserved punishment on Him. Instead He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. His punishment brought our peace. His wounds brought our healing. This is terribly unfair. But as one songwriter has put it, "The beauty of grace is that it makes life not fair."

All of us, yes, including me and you, all of us have gone astray like sheep. All of us, each of us, has turned to our own way. Yet in a way that seems terribly unfair, the Lord has seen fit to lay on Him our iniquity. The iniquity of all of us.

He in our place. Oh, divine mystery. Oh, beautiful, unfair grace. It is a gift for all of us. May each of us accept it with gratitude to God.

"JESUS BEARS OUR SINS"

Thursday, April 9 | Isaiah 53:7-9 | Mary Splawn

On some level, you and I have each experienced the consequences for our own sins. Think back to a time in childhood when you disobeyed. Did you have some type of punishment for your mischief?

When I think back, I remember one Easter Sunday in particular. My extended family had gathered at my uncle's house for lunch and I was wearing a new dress. It had begun to rain and my dad told me not to go outside because I would get my dress dirty. But my cousin from Texas convinced me it would be okay to play in the elements just this once. Needless to say that when my dad saw me in my wet dress, he was not happy and there were consequences! My disobedience was met with discipline. Ironically, my cousin who got me in the mess wasn't punished.

It is hard to endure punishment, but in many situations when consequences are given, the punishment matches the crime. Yet, in this passage in Isaiah, we are reminded that Jesus, the Suffering Servant, took on punishment that wasn't His for crimes He did not commit. Have you heard the term substitutionary atonement? It means that Jesus died for our sins—He was our "substitute." In other words, He took on our punishment. Isaiah's prophetic language says it this way: "For the transgression of my people He was punished" (Isaiah 53:8 NIV). Jesus endured punishment on the cross to pay for our sins and reconcile us to God, or as some say, to make us "at one" with God.

As this Scripture tells us and as we read in the gospels "by oppression and judgment He was taken away" (Isaiah 53:8 NIV). Instead of being surrounded by followers who demanded Jesus' release from unjust punishment, none of His generation protested (Isaiah 53:8). When given the chance to defend Himself, Jesus was silent; willing to accept a punishment that should have been for us. "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7 NIV).

Today's passage ends on a dark and desperate note: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth" (Isaiah 53:9 NIV).

Jesus took on the punishment of death for our sins. He was laid in the grave ... and while we know the rest of the story, it might be best for us to sit in the realization for a moment that He endured our discipline, our consequences, our suffering.

Our conscience doesn't like to think about people being punished for crimes they didn't commit. For this reason, there is a principle in criminal law that states, "It is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer" (Blackstone's Ratio).

Yet, Jesus, the innocent one, suffered for our sakes. As Peter says it, "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18 NIV).

Today as you contemplate Jesus' unjust punishment, praise God for His provision for our lives. Ask the Lord to help you not take His sacrifice lightly. Contemplate the bravery and determination displayed by our Lord. Picture Him willingly die on our behalf.

As you ponder His sacrifice anew, ask your loving Savior to walk with you today and to make you aware of His great love for you. Listen to His voice in His Word and through His Spirit. Marvel at the Bible which foretold of His sacrifice centuries before Jesus endured the cross for us. And thank Him for standing in your place and suffering for your sins.

NOTES on Isaiah 53:7-9

"JESUS INTERCEDES FOR US"

Friday, April 10 | Isaiah 53:10-12 | Wayne Splawn

Today is Good Friday and our attention is focused on Jesus' death on the cross. One of the most striking aspects of Luke's passion narrative is the way Jesus prays for His tormentors on the cross. In Luke 24, Luke records these words, "And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" (Luke 24:34 ESV). If I were being unjustly executed, my natural response would not be to pray the Lord would forgive my executioners. Instead, I would likely be praying for deliverance or justice or for judgement to be poured out on those taking my life. But Jesus does no such thing. Instead, He intercedes for His enemies, asking the Father to forgive them because they do not know what they are doing.

Isaiah 53:12 anticipates Jesus' intercessory prayer from the cross. Isaiah writes that the Suffering Servant "bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12 ESV). On this day, we are reminded of the price Jesus paid on the cross to save us from our sins. We have transgressed God's commands and fallen short of His glory. We deserve death and condemnation. Rather than giving us the punishment we deserve, Jesus showed the depth of His love for us by taking on our humanity, becoming like us in every respect, except without sin, so that He might endure the punishment we deserve for our sins. And Jesus didn't stop there. Instead, He continues to intercede on our behalf even now.

Our consciences and other people may still condemn us for the sins we have committed that make us unworthy of God's love. But, the Christian's hope can not be extinguished by such accusing voices. Instead, Jesus Christ continues to intercede on our behalf. Paul puts it like this in Romans 8:34, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (ESV). Christian, as you consider Jesus' death on the cross on this Good Friday, praise Him for interceding on your behalf so that you will never experience God's condemnation.

