

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

November 27, 2022 | *The Servant, Part 2*

SERIES PREVIEW

Last year, Oakwood small groups studied the life of Jesus. One of the things we learned was that Jesus's life was part of a larger story that began long before He was born and will continue until after He comes again. All of human history centers on the man we profess to be the savior of the world. It is not surprising that Christians following Christ's ascension continue to define our lives in terms of Jesus's story. What may be surprising to many is that the generations before Christ's birth looked forward to His coming. This series will examine eight Old Testament passages that anticipate the first coming of Christ. Each lesson will identify the main idea of the passage and give special consideration to how the passage points to the first coming of Christ. May this series prepare your heart to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

How do you respond to suffering? How do you respond to seeing someone else suffer?

Read Isaiah 50 and 52:13–53:12.

Pray that this lesson will help you catch a glimpse of what Christ endured for you.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The servant is despised, but he remains at the heart of God's plan.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our response to the servant makes all the difference for eternity.

MEDITATE

"Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin

of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the lesson by considering the theme of rejection, which links these two Servant Songs.

❓: *Why is rejection hard? What are some different kinds of rejection?*

❓: *What are some ways people shield themselves from rejection?*

No one likes to be rejected. Regardless of the situation, rejection brings hopes and dreams to a halt. It can negate loads of hard work. It can be the end of relationships. Rejection can put life on pause.

Although we may not like rejection, we have no right to expect that we will not encounter it in our lives. Jesus, on the other hand, could reasonably question why He should ever encounter rejection. He is the Son of God. He is God Himself. He came to give of Himself, not take. Nevertheless, His life was marked by constant rejection. The religious elites despised Him. And although He drew large crowds, they deserted Him at His crucifixion. Jesus experienced rejection at nearly every turn in His ministry.

The final two Servant Songs foresaw Jesus’s rejection from ancient times. Isaiah 50:8 references the servant’s adversaries. Isaiah 53:3 declares Jesus was despised and rejected by men. The rejection Jesus faced in His life was foretold long ago

❓: *Why would the Old Testament foretell Jesus’s rejection? Why not focus only on the positive aspects of His life?*

❓: *Have you experienced rejection because of your faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus knew He would be rejected by the world, and He warned His followers that they would be rejected too (John 15:18). He used the word “hate.” This shows that the rejection He and His followers

experience is not merely an unimpassioned indifference but a focused disdain. It is part of following Jesus. We will share in His rejection.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson will examine the last two Servant Songs. As with the first two, the servant's identity is debated, but Christians have consistently understood these Servant Songs to refer to Jesus.

1. THE MESSAGE OF THE SERVANT
2. THE SUFFERING SERVANT

GOING DEEPER

+This section will consider each point above and draw applications for a modern audience.

1. THE MESSAGE OF THE SERVANT

■ ISAIAH 50:4-11

Q: *What did the speaker mean by “the tongue of those who are taught”?*

Q: *Why did he ask God for a “tongue of those who are taught”?*

This passage begins with the servant describing the help he gives to the weary. The context of this statement is not immediately clear. It could occur within a wartime context with the servant encouraging His fellow soldiers before a battle. Or he could be encouraging laborers in the midst of a building project. The context could simply be the exile in which the people found themselves yearning to return home. Whatever be the case, his message is clear. He was given the ability to speak to those in need of encouragement. He was a teacher who pushed His students to continue on.

Q: *How does Isaiah 50:4 show the need for being involved in a local church?*

Q: *How can you encourage others with God's Word this week?*

APPLICATION POINT – Just as the servant encouraged those around him with a word from God, we must also encourage one another with God's Word. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul commanded the people to encourage and build one another up. In Hebrews, the author commanded readers to consider how they can stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Being a follower of Christ is often challenging, but it is easier if we follow Christ's example in this Servant Song.

Q: *Why did the servant not resist the mistreatment of others?*

Q: *What was the basis for the servant's confidence in Isaiah 50:7-9?*

The servant was well acquainted with sorrow. His suffering is described in the next section, but in Isaiah 50, he received lashes while in the hands of his enemies. His enemies were those who rebelled against God (Isaiah 50:5), which the servant refused to do.

The servant, however, had no need to fear his enemies because God is his help (Isaiah 50:7). Even though the goal of his enemies was to disgrace Him, God would keep Him from disgrace and shame. With God's help, the efforts of those opposing the shepherd were brought to nothing, so much so that the servant could ask, "Who will contend with me? ... Who will oppose me? ... "Who will condemn me?" These are remarkable questions for someone receiving lashes and having his beard ripped out. The servant had complete confidence in God. It was his enemies who would not endure. They would be worn down and eaten by moths.

Q: *Why is it challenging to maintain our faith when we are suffering?*

Q: *How does our faith in Christ put our suffering and trials into proper perspective?*

APPLICATION POINT – The servant faced incredible opposition, but He trusted God to deliver him. When we trust in God’s deliverance rather than our own, we can endure hardships because we have faith that God will ultimately hold every deed accountable. We do not need to take matters into our own hands or waver in our faith.

Q: *What did Isaiah mean by “darkness” and “light” in this passage?*

Q: *Why is it wrong for people to kindle a fire or wield a burning torch in these verses?*

This Servant Song concludes by urging people to follow the servant and his God (Isaiah 50:10). Those who walk in darkness must trust in the Lord. If they try to find their own way by lighting a fire and burning a torch, they will be consumed by their efforts (Isaiah 50:11). We must understand Isaiah’s metaphor to understanding what he was saying. The darkness is a life of rejecting God and His servant. Isaiah was urging those who reject the servant to yield to the servant’s leadership. If they persisted in rejecting him and trying to find their own way, they would seal their own demise.

Q: *In what ways do you see people pursuing salvation apart from Christ? Why is this so tempting?*

Q: *Why is it better for salvation to be found in Christ alone rather than anything we could accomplish?*

APPLICATION POINT – Isaiah’s warning highlights the impossibility of approaching God in our own way. God has made Jesus the way of salvation. Forgiveness of sin can only be found in confessing Him as Savior and Lord. If we attempt to secure our salvation in any other way, we will only bring our own destruction.

2. THE SUFFERING SERVANT

ISAIAH 52:13–53:12

Q: *How does Isaiah 52:13–53:12 capture the agony of Christ’s suffering and death to an even greater extent than the New Testament?*

Q: *Why did Isaiah focus on the servant’s appearance?*

The Suffering Servant song is widely recognized by the followers of Christ as detailing His rejection and substitutionary death more than five hundred years ahead of time. Many would even say the Suffering Servant song describes the events surrounding Jesus’s death with greater emotion than even the New Testament. If you want to feel the pain of rejection and suffering Jesus felt on the cross, Isaiah’s Suffering Servant song is the first place to go.

The Suffering Servant song begins by describing the Jesus’s brutal treatment and rejection. He was beaten so badly that it was difficult to see he was human (Isaiah 52:14). Even before his appearance was marred, he could easily be overlooked. There was never anything extraordinary about his appearance (Isaiah 53:2). His appearance is tied to His rejection. He was despised by all, and people did not want to even look at him (Isaiah 53:3). Isaiah’s words describe Jesus’s brutally beaten body on the cross.

Q: *Why did Christ suffer in addition to His death on the cross?*

Q: *If others turn their faces from Christ crucified, why must believers turn them back?*

APPLICATION POINT – The thought of Jesus’s body mangled on the cross remains tough for us to think about two thousand years later. While those in Jesus’s own time and many others since have rejected Him, we know that our only hope for salvation is to embrace the man others refused to even look at. The marred and deformed man others despised is the sweetest sight we could behold.

Q: *What surprising element did Isaiah introduce beginning in Isaiah 53:4?*

Q: *Why was it God's will for His servant to suffer?*

After describing the servant's suffering, Isaiah went on to describe the meaning behind his suffering. He was not suffering because of what he had done. Instead, he suffered on behalf of others. He bore the grief and sorrow created by the sins of others (Isaiah 53:4–5). Remarkably, this was the Lord's doing (Isaiah 53:6). God approved of the suffering of the servant.

Although the servant's suffering was unjust, he did not protest (Isaiah 53:7). He willingly sacrificed himself on behalf of others. At death, the servant was buried with the wicked. He would be associated with the wicked even to the grave although he was not himself wicked (Isaiah 53:9).

If the mistreatment of the servant arouses indignation, Isaiah quickly reminded His readers that this was God's will (Isaiah 53:10). God intended the servant to suffer for others as a sacrifice for their guilt. Those who find forgiveness from God because of the servant's suffering will become the servant's offspring. Because of his suffering, they will prosper (Isaiah 53:10–11).

Q: *Christians rejoice at the idea of Christ as our sacrifice. Do we equally rejoice at the idea of Christ as our example in suffering?*

Q: *What allusions to Isaiah 52:13–53:12 do you see in 1 Peter 2:18–25? What do these connections mean for us?*

APPLICATION POINT – Our need to receive Jesus's suffering on our behalf for our salvation was covered under the previous point. It is crucial for us to recognize that Christians are called to share in Christ's sufferings just as we share in His resurrection. Peter recognized Christ as our example in suffering when he addressed Christian servants:

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:18–25).

Peter's words contain multiple allusions to Isaiah 52:13–53:12. They are a sobering reminder for all believers. In many ways, we could find ourselves in Isaiah 52:13–53:12. We will never suffer for the salvation of others like Jesus did, but Christians are called to follow Jesus's example in suffering.

❖: *Isaiah 53:12 describes dividing up portions and spoils. How is it gloriously unexpected that the servant would receive a portion of the spoils?*

❖: *Why is the servant numbered with the transgressors?*

Isaiah 53:12 is one of the most significant verses in the Bible. It begins with an allusion to warriors dividing up the spoils of war. Even though the servant poured out his soul to death, he still received a portion of the spoils. This is unprecedented. No matter how valiantly a warrior fought in battle, if he died, he was not around to receive a portion of the spoils. Dead men receive no portion, but the servant did! Death was not the end of the servant.

This is even more remarkable when we recognize that, in this sense, the “battle” was not a conflict of one nation against another over land and property but God against His people over their sins. Again, the Lord acknowledged that the servant had borne the sins of many upon himself, but sin did not crush him. He was still around to divide up the spoils. The servant was about to withstand the crushing weight of sin.

❖: *How would Christianity be different if the servant bore our sins but was not around to receive the spoils?*

Q: *The servant received a portion along with others. Why do we share in his spoils even though we did nothing to win the battle against sin?*

APPLICATION POINT – Isaiah 53:12 allows us to know that Christ has taken the full extent of God’s wrath against our sins. If Christ were not raised from the dead, we could have no certainty of this. If He were not resurrected, we might believe that perhaps He absorbed the full measure of God’s wrath, but there might be more wrath waiting for us when we die. We could not know and would live in uncertainty. In the New Testament, Paul removed the uncertainty. He argued that if Christ were not raised from the dead, then we are still in our sins, and our faith is futile. The portion the servant received is our guarantee of peace with our God.

NEXT STEPS

As the Christmas season approaches, peoples’ minds are drawn to Jesus’s incarnation and birth. These are wonderful truths for Christians to focus on, but it is also appropriate to focus on Jesus’s death during this season. One of the reasons Jesus was born was to die on our behalf. As God leads, help others you meet during this season to make this connection as well. It may take them by surprise. Some will wonder why you wish to spoil the Christmas season by thinking about Jesus’s death. But the true meaning of Jesus’s birth cannot be fully appreciated apart from His death on our behalf and His resurrection. Use the focus on Jesus this season to point people to the gospel.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.

-Lord, the servant promised to sustain the weary with a word. I am weary. Sustain me with your word.

-Jesus, you were pierced for my transgressions. I will praise your name for all eternity.

-Father, your plan for my redemption is more than I deserve. Help me to live my life in light of the suffering Jesus endured on my behalf. Make me ever more faithful to Your will. Make me ever more willing to lay myself aside for the sake of your kingdom.

-God, help me to suffer well. As Christ is my example in all of life, make Him my example in suffering as well. Strengthen my faith so I may endure whatever trials are before me.