

“The Fifth Gospel”

Isaiah 53

Series: “The Thread: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament”

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I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving. We are continuing today in *The Thread* series: *Finding Jesus in the Old Testament*.

Beginning next week, we will continue this series in a special Christmas edition of *The Thread* if and we will look over the next three Sundays at how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest and king. I think this will be a wonderful “series within a series” if you will in preparing our hearts for Christmas.

Today, we are looking at Isaiah 53. The title of the message is one that was first termed by the early church historian and theologian, Augustine. He called, the book of Isaiah: **The Fifth Gospel**

John Calvin wrote and preached a number of sermons specifically on Isaiah 53 that he called, *The Gospel According to Isaiah*. Luther thought and taught that every Christian should have Isaiah 53 memorized. It’s been referred to as the “crown jewel”...the pinnacle of messianic prophecy.

Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon on Isaiah 53 entitled *Man of Sorrows* and he wrote in that sermon: **“This is one of the chapters that lie at the very heart of the Scriptures. It is the very Holy of holies of Divine Writ. Let us, therefore put off our shoes from our feet, for the place whereon we stand is specially holy ground. The fifty-third of Isaiah is a Bible in miniature. It is the condensed essence of the gospel.”**

Now, the word “gospel” means good news. And this “good news” is most clearly articulated by Paul in the New Testament:

1 Cor. 15:3-4 – “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...”

The message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the good news in a nutshell. It’s good news because contained within it is how our sins can be forgiven and how we can be made right with God – it is by placing our faith in Christ who lived, died was buried and raised again to life - THIS is the gospel...and this “good news” is meant to be declared and shared!

Isaiah can rightly be described as the fifth gospel because in chapter 53 – we read of the “good news” of death, burial and resurrection of Jesus SEVEN centuries before it would ever occur.

And so, let’s look at it together and we’ll break this passage up into three easily digestible sections. We’ll see in this passage of scripture: the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection.

Let's look first at: **The Incarnation**

Illus. Advent – Today marks the first day of Advent. If you follow the liturgical church calendar, four Sundays leading up to Christmas is a special time that is designed and set apart where we as followers of Jesus are meant to prepare our hearts for the arrival of the Christ to earth and all that it means.

I would really encourage you, if don't already have a reading plan to download one – there are plenty of them online – literally millions of options (Google Advent Bible Reading Plan). The goal is to set some time aside each day to reflect on the meaning of Jesus's birth.

The incarnation is the greatest miracle in all of the Bible – God wrapping himself in flesh! Just think about that! In his book *Miracles*, **C.S. Lewis** writes of the incarnation which he calls “The Grand Miracle”:

“The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation...Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this...It was the central event in the history of the Earth—the very thing that the whole story has been about.”

We see this “Grand Miracle”...the incarnation in the opening verses of Isaiah 53. Let's look at it:

Isaiah 53:1-2 – “Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.”

This passage opens with two questions...two questions that need to be answered. The first is, “Who has believed what he has heard from us? (v. 1) – Isaiah starts off this prophecy in utter amazement that God would give him this message to proclaim.

And the message he is proclaiming? It's all about this figure known in Isaiah as the Lord's servant.

We read of this “servant” being born over and over in Isaiah's gospel. This “servant” is the Messiah figure to come. He is this ideal King who will ultimately restore and deliver God's people from various nations that have overtaken them, exiled them and attempted to destroy them.

We read of this servant's birth in: **Isaiah 9:6-7 – “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”**

We read of how this Servant will one day rule and reign in: **Isaiah 11:1-5** - “**There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.**”

And so, it is this “servant” figure that God’s people hang ALL of their hopes upon. This one who will rule and reign in righteousness and faithfulness. This is who they are looking for and looking to, and regardless of the nation’s present circumstances...doesn’t matter the religious or political turmoil they may find themselves in, God has promised a servant to come.

Only here in Isaiah 52-53, we see that this Servant – his appearance will be “marred beyond human semblance” (Is. 52:13-14)...we see this this same type of language in (Is. 53:3-9).

It appears this Servant is treated harshly...will be rejected by men? He is a suffering servant.

What does all this mean? Isaiah says, who has believed what they are hearing? It doesn’t make sense on the surface. The second question in **Isaiah 53:1b** – “**And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?**”

The “arm of the LORD” represented God’s power. Isaiah is asking a rhetorical question here. He knows that not many will believe once the arm of the LORD is revealed and this Servant is made known and he tells us why in:

Isaiah 53:2a – “**For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground...**”

The bible is prophesying that the Messiah would come from the most unlikely of places and would have very humble beginnings.

This term “young plant” is meant to describe a useless branch usually at the base of a tree that siphons off resources and nutrients from the main branches of a tree. Usually, they are broken off and removed.

Isaiah prophesies that this “Servant of the Lord” would be like a unwanted root that sprouts up from the ground...you don’t take care of unwanted roots, you remove them!

People will not believe the Messiah’s message because they will not believe the messenger himself! He won’t seem like a leader...he won’t have the look of a leader.

Isaiah 53:2b puts it like this: “**...He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.**”

- charisma – out the window...
- charm – not his deal...
- style – spent time with the least and the neglected in society...

Think of Jesus – he was a peasant for the most part. Born in a stable in Bethlehem...the son of an obscure carpenter. In Jesus...in the incarnation “the arm of the Lord” was revealed and yet, no one wanted much of anything to do with him.

Who would believe this, Isaiah asks? It doesn't make sense that the arm of the Lord (the power of the Lord) would be revealed in such a downplayed sort of way. And we know this “arm of the Lord” was revealed Israel and what did Israel do?

John 1:11 – “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”

I remind you, while the angels split heaven open to celebrate his arrival, no one else did besides some outcast shepherds they had made the announcement to. This is the incarnation and life of Christ. It was one of rejection.

And we see this rejection most clearly in the second section of this text, and it covers: **The Crucifixion**

So many would not believe in the Messiah...God's servant because of his upbringing - the insignificant and humble start to his life. Others would not believe because of how he was treated – how could the Lord's Servant be described like this?

Isaiah 53:3-9 – “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised (goes back to 52:13-14 – marred beyond semblance – this is a picture of the cross and the brutal beating prior to the cross!), and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

Now, these verses constitute the heart of Isaiah 53, and it is the very heart of the gospel, and I really do feel a tremendous weight when preaching this text and this subject.

If (v. 1-2) speak mainly about the incarnation – the birth and life of Christ, (v. 3-9) speak mainly of the crucifixion – the work of Christ on the cross and his death.

Allow me to highlight (v. 4-6) and if there is a word that I could draw out of these three verses, it would be the word substitution. At the core of the crucifixion is substitution.

Illus. New Series in new year – Thinking about a series in January and right now it’s going to be around the subject of “These Things Never Change.”

I know as a church, we’ve experienced a lot of change over the last few years. Covid changed us...then you add to the fact that a new pastor has come in and that has been a change. We’ve added new ministries and new staff (12 across our three campuses in the last two years NOT counting our residents!). We’re in the middle of our FORWARD campaign renovating so much of our building and there has been a lot of change.

Well, I’m praying about coming back in the New Year and preaching and emphasizing some of the things that NEVER CHANGE. And one of the beliefs that we have as a church that will NEVER change is the belief in what we call penal substitutionary atonement – this is a core doctrine of our faith.

I’ll put it on the screen for you: **Penal Substitutionary Atonement**. This is the idea...the doctrine that states...and I’m quoting Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* Book: **Christ’s death was “penal” in that he bore a penalty when he died. His death was also a “substitution” in that he was a substitute for us when he died.**

This doctrine is also known as “Vicarious Atonement”. A “vicar” is someone who represents someone else. “Atonement” is to cover”. Jesus on the cross was our vicar! He represented me and you. He substituted himself and took the penalty that we deserved and this act “covered” our sin...it atoned for our sin!

This is Isaiah 53 especially (v. 4-6). Let’s just look at it one more time in detail:

Isaiah 53:4-6 - “**Surely** (a word of exclamation here...there is ZERO doubt in this!) **he has borne our griefs and carried our (UNDERSCORE) sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.** ⁵ **But he was pierced for our (HIGHLIGHT/UNDERSCORE) transgressions; he was crushed for our (Repeat: OUR) iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.** ⁶ **All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”**

Substitution. We saw hints of it:

- in Genesis 3 when God slays an animal in order to cover the nakedness and shame of Adam and Eve.

- We saw it pretty plainly in Genesis 22 when Abraham raises the knife to slay his son, Isaac and God stays his hand providing a ram in the thicket.
- We saw it in Exodus 12, when the family would bring the spotless lamb into their home only to slay it and put the blood of the lamb over the door of their home. Rather than the death angel striking the firstborn in the family, the family struck the lamb – it was a substitute, and it’s blood was a covering!
- We saw substitution last week when we looked at Psalm 23 and then John 10, reading the words of Jesus where he says on four different occasions, “I lay my life down for the sheep”.

(v. 4) – “He has borne OUR griefs...carried OUR sorrows.” – SUBSTITUTION!

(v. 5) – “He was wounded for OUR transgressions and crushed for OUR iniquities – SUBSTITUTION!

Some of your Bibles use the word “pierced” – it’s a picture of nails going through the hands and feet of Jesus! Isn’t it amazing that crucifixion wasn’t even invented when Isaiah is writing this prophecy and yet it is an AMAZING picture of what happens on the cross! The burden of sin CRUSHED Jesus!

See, it should have been me and you that was wounded – it was our transgressions and sins! It should have been me and you crushed – it was our iniquities! If anyone should be drinking the cup of the wrath of God, it should have been me and you, but instead it’s the Lord’s Servant that does it...he suffers in our place!

As one Christian writer I read this week wrote: **“This is the heart of the gospel of Jesus— substitution. This is the great message of good news that God has for rebel subjects who are willing to lay down their rebellion. Instead of collapsing in grief over our rejection, he bears our griefs. Instead of increasing our sorrows, he carries our sorrows. Instead of avenging our transgressions, he is pierced for them in our place. Instead of crushing us for our iniquities, he is crushed for them as our substitute. And all the chastisement and whipping that belong to us for our rebellion he takes on himself in order that we might have peace and be healed.”**

Have you thought about Jesus dying in your place lately? You know, we put crosses in our homes...we wear them around our neck...we put them on the top of our churches. We use them as décor...and that’s fine I suppose, but it shouldn’t be JUST for décor.

The cross represents too much! At the heart of the image of the cross is a message – Christ died in our place. He substituted himself FOR us!

Paul wrote in **2 Cor. 5:21** – **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

This has been referred to as the Great Exchange. Christ took on our sin and in exchange we get his righteousness – AMAZING! Look at (v. 7-9).

Isaiah 53:7-9 – “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

One of the reasons we can believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah is because of fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah 53 is one of those texts where it is hard to escape the person and work of Jesus. We see prophecy fulfilled over and over again in these three verses.

3x in this passage of scripture we read that Jesus did not open his mouth when led to the slaughter. We KNOW this was fulfilled.

Matt. 26:62-63 – “And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” But Jesus remained silent.”

Matt. 27:11-14 – “Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.”

There are six “episodes” in the trial of Jesus and every one of them a mockery of justice...and not one time does Jesus appeal for another trial, but rather according to:

1 Peter 2:22-23 – “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.”

No doubt when Peter wrote this he was looking back on the crucifixion account and pairing it with Isaiah 53.

(v. 8) – “he was cut off out of the land of the living” – that is just another way of saying, the innocent lamb of God...the “Suffering Servant” died.

(v. 9) – He was buried – “And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death...”

This is fulfilled in **Matt. 27:57-60 – “When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and**

wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away.”

Remember our definition of the gospel from **1 Cor. 15:3-4** – **“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures (Is. 53!), that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...”**

We have seen in Isaiah 53 the Messiah...the suffering servant dies. We have seen that he would be buried...is there any hint at the resurrection?

This is the third and final section of this passage: **The Resurrection**

Isaiah 53:10-12 – **“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him** (this was no accident...part of the divine design and plan of God. All things happening under the direct plan and foreknowledge of God – as John MacArthur wrote in his book on Is. 53 – “the servant’s death is God’s doing!”); **he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring** (hint #1 – people will trust in him and he will see them...relationship – he is alive!); **he shall prolong his days** (hint #2 – speaks to eternal life – death can’t defeat him! He is alive forevermore!); **the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.** (hint #3 – all authority on heaven and earth is his...it’s in his hands...ESV note – the servant becomes the executor! He is alive!) **Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied** (hint #4 – his work is complete! It is finished...no more to do...he is alive and sitting at the right hand of God!); **by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous** (justified), **and he shall bear their iniquities** (hint #5 – Christ rising from the dead proves his death was an acceptable sacrifice – only a risen Christ can justify). **Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong** (hint #6 – he shares his victory with us! Now because of his death and resurrection we have gone from the weak to the strong...only happens if he is alive!), **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.”** (hint #7 – only a living, risen Savior can make intercession for us...it’s the resurrection!)

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.”**

Hebrews 7:25 – **“Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”**

In this passage, we have the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection – we have the GOSPEL! Is it any wonder hundreds of years later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, one of his followers...a man named Phillip would come across a spiritual seeker from Ethiopia.

And do you remember this encounter in the book of Acts? I conclude reading it:

Acts 8:30-35 – “So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.”

The good news straight from Isaiah 53. The Thread – ALL of the Bible points to Jesus. The question for you is the same that we encountered in (v. 1) – Who has believed this?

See, you have a choice today. It’s the same choice that people had when Jesus walked the earth. You can receive this message/messenger OR like this prophecy states, you can reject him.

Illus. Christmas Spectacular – see the story of Christmas, and I’ll make this same appeal – EVERY person has a choice – reject Jesus, the servant of the Lord OR receive him into your life.

John 1:12 – “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

How do you receive him? The same way you will receive any gift this Christmas season. You take it.

Don’t reject the greatest gift God has ever given. Instead receive him into your life by faith...by believing that:

- Jesus did come to this earth, God in the flesh – that’s incarnation.
- Jesus died FOR YOU. He paid the penalty that was yours – that’s crucifixion.
- Jesus was raised to life – that’s resurrection.

Believe. Receive. And be changed forever. Let’s pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.