

The Greatest Prophecy Ever Made (Part 1) – Is 52:13–53:12

I’m thankful for AJ and Jeremy who preached in my place last week – faithful men who are able to teach and rightly divide the Word of truth

And I want to make the most of our time just as they did, by turning to Is 52:13-15

This is the 4th and final “Servant Song” as it’s commonly called here in Isaiah, that’s so significant and so important to our faith, I plan on spending several weeks in it
B/c it’s prophecy about a Messianic Servant, a servant sent by God, who would rescue and redeem us from our bondage to sin; A servant we now know, is Jesus

And I don’t think I’m stretching it to say that . . .

Isaiah 53 is the greatest prophecy in the Bible

And by Is 53, I’m including the last 3 verses of ch52, b/c that’s where the prophecy starts

And hands down it’s the most amazing foretelling, about the most amazing event and amazing figure, in the history of the world

Amazing b/c of what it says, who it’s about, when it was made, and the *detail*

- Starting in v13 with the prediction that *he* [this servant of God] *shall be high and lifted up* – it doesn’t tell us how, but that’s a detail
As is v14 – *his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind*; Pretty detailed
And 53:3 – *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, and we esteemed him not*. Detail after detail

And v5 – *he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities*
And v7 – *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth*
And v9 – *they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death*
And v10 – *he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days*
And v11 – [he] *will make many to be accounted righteous*
And v12 – *he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors*
It’s detail upon detail, both in *what* happened, and *how* it happened

But that doesn’t make it great in and of itself; Anybody can make detailed predictions
It’s the *fulfillment* of the details that make it great

- I’ll never forget a conversation I had with my oldest brother in that respect
He called me several years ago about something I’ve long forgotten, but in the course of the conversation, I *do* remember him telling me that he was reading Isaiah . . .
And was absolutely floored by it; Especially this particular passage
He just couldn’t believe how intricate and *accurate* it was regarding the life of Christ
And made the comment that Isaiah had to be the greatest *prophet*, and this passage the greatest *prophecy*

And though I think I mumbled something in agreement, it wasn’t until I went back and read it again, that I too was struck to the *core* by this text; And have been ever since
B/c it’s *so* detailed and so *accurate* when it comes to the life and death of Jesus

- But that’s exactly where other people get hung up; Thinking there’s no *way* this could have been written before Jesus died; It’s *too* detailed

It had to have been written after the fact, and then inserted into the text of Isaiah by those who just wanted to bolster their own beliefs and following

Which was difficult to refute on a purely *objective* basis; B/c up until 70 years ago the earliest copy of Isaiah that we had, dated from about 1000AD – 970 years *after* Jesus
It’s called the **Masoretic Text – 1000AD**
We had copies in *Greek* from around 200AD, but none in Hebrew earlier than the 9th or 10th century; So maybe it *was* added back in; And the debate raged

Until, 1947; When 3 **Bedouin shepherds** discovered a previously unknown *cave*, like this one, in a remote area about a mile NW of the **Dead Sea**

And in that cave, among other things, they found a **scroll of Isaiah** dating fr ~200BC

A full 200 years *before* Christ, and 1200 years older than the Masoretic text

It’s 24 feet long, written on 17 sheets of parchment, and contains the *entire* text of Isaiah – the whole thing; Including chapter 53

And the best part, the part that killed the objection that it was added *after* the fact, is that the difference between the two scrolls is practically negligible
Even though they’re separated by 1200 years of *hand copying*
In fact, of the differences that *do* exist, the vast majority are simply spelling errors or spelling changes, that neither alter the pronunciation nor change the meaning

Settling once and for all, at least for an objective person, that Isaiah 53 is indeed a genuine prophecy about the life and death of Jesus*****

- But of course that doesn’t stop skeptics; And I want you to know what some of them say, so that you can give a reasoned response . . .
And not be shaken when you encounter them; Like Jewish interpreters who say . . .
“Ya, it’s genuine alright; And *written* by Isaiah; But it’s not about Jesus; It’s not about the Messiah; It’s not even about a *person*”
“It’s about the *Israelites*; They’re just *personified* as an individual, and referred to as “he”; Which in some places of Isaiah, is true

But not here; B/c that would mean that some Israelite community along the way, would be the ones who bear our sins (11) and make intercession for the rest of us (12)
Which not only flies in the face of the Law at that time – that a *spotless* substitute was needed for such things, and a *holy* high priest . . .
But it’s also contrary to the overwhelming amount of individual *language* . . .
And the fact that the servant does what he does on *behalf* of the Israelites
So they can’t be one and the same

- Meanwhile, others say – “No, it’s not about the Israelites, it’s about *Isaiah*; *He’s* the servant; *He’s* the one who was crushed for our iniquities
He’s the one who would make many righteous
And if not him, then an unnamed second Moses of sorts; Or a king of that day; Or maybe even a leprous rabbi; I’m not making this stuff up; Others are

And a few even go so far as to say that this has nothing to do with the spiritual stuff of making many righteous and bearing our sins . . .

Isaiah just couched it in those terms to conceal the identity of a *political* figure who lobbied the Babylonians for their release; Where they get that I have no idea
But if theology had a wild, wild west for vivid imaginations, that would qualify

- All of which reflects the lengths to which people will go, to avoid admitting that this is about *Jesus*; Why? B/c they don't want to bend the knee
They don't want to humble themselves and submit to his Lordship
Which is exactly what I'm going to give *you* the opportunity to do, before we're done
B/c that's the *point* of all this
Far from just adding to our repertoire of knowledge, this prophecy is intended to bring about awe, and submission, and humility on our part

So to that end . . .

Prophecy #1: God's servant would shock the world with his suffering and methods (13-15)

That's the first of 5 prophecies in this passage, starting in ch52:13 – *Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.*

He shall act wisely, in that he will say and do all the best things in order to accomplish all of God's purposes; And he would be exalted, as in glorified and dignified

And after reading in ch42 that he would be a *covenant* for the people – a guarantee of our salvation; And a light for the *nations* (42:6) . . .

And release us from the consequences of our sins (7)

And in ch49 that he would spread salvation to the end of the earth (49:6)

And in ch51 that it's a *sure* thing

And then in ch52 that we should put on our Sunday best and get ready to party . . .

After all that, our first impulse at v13 is like – “Ya! Let's go! It's game day baby! Bring it on!”

- Until, we get to v14; Where God is speaking *to* his servant, and says . . .

[14] *As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—[15] so shall he sprinkle many nations*

God starts by speaking *to* his servant, and then mid-sentence it's like he turns to us with an explanation – an explanation for *why* people would be so astonished at him
Namely, that he would be beaten to a pulp and physically abused; Just like the servant said of *himself* in **Is 50:6**, the 3rd Servant Song

I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

No wonder his appearance would be marred; No wonder he wouldn't look human*****

- And this idea in v15 that he would *sprinkle many nations*, carries the connotation of startling them and cleansing them; *So shall he* [startle and cleanse] *many nations*
Startle, b/c that's what the Hebrew word for sprinkle conveys; Like when you flick water in someone's face, it startles them
And cleanse, b/c that's what the Israelites would have *associated* with sprinkling

Like when the priests of old sprinkled *blood* on the people, to symbolize their ritual purity
Or on a leper to show his acceptance back into the community
It was a symbol of their *cleansing*

So the flow of thought in v14-15 goes something like this – As many were shocked at how you *look*, so shall you shock them by what you *do*

In being beaten to a pulp, then raised high and lifted up, to save us from our sins, and eventually be exalted

- Which is why *kings shall shut their mouths because of him* – 15b
They'll be speechless; Dumbfounded
Even the high and mighty – those who've been *designated* to speak

For that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. They get it; Without a word being spoken . . .

They're eyes would be opened by what they see in the suffering servant

Leaving them at a loss for words, b/c they've never heard of one being so *exalted* after being so humiliated

They've never heard of a Savior who suffers; They've never heard of someone who gains all things by *losing* all things

They've never heard of someone going so low, to go so high

They've never heard of one who suffers so much for the purpose of attaining so much

Leaving some, like Pilate in Jesus' day, speechless; And others suppressing speech

Like the Jewish elders who told the guard at the tomb to sweep it under the rug

For that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (15b) They get it, but they don't necessarily accept it

- That's prophecy #1; That God's servant, who would deliver his people from the bondage and consequences of their sin, and then reign on high . . .
Would do so through suffering and humility; Shocking

And yet that's exactly what Jesus did; Which is the first reason that he's the *fulfillment* of this prophecy

Fulfillment: Jesus was bloodied and humble (Mk 15:15; Phil 2:5-11)

Shocking the world, and fulfilling this prophecy to a “T”; Like it says in Jn 19:1

That Jesus was flogged, crowned with thorns, and struck by the soldiers

That's bloodied; There's just no getting around it

And **Mk 15:15** says – *So Pilate* [the Roman governor in Judea at the time], *wishing to satisfy the crowd* [who were demanding that Jesus be crucified, hung on a cross], *released for them Barabbas* [a prisoner], *and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

- And it was the scourging that so disfigured him
A brutal, brutal process – where a person was stripped naked, tied over a horizontal pole so as to expose all the parts of his body . . .
And then severely beaten by two people, one on each side, with multi-lashed whips containing imbedded pieces of bone and metal

And not just on the back, but from the top of the shoulders to the bottoms of their feet
Ripping pieces of flesh from the body, and often causing the recipient to go into hypovolemic shock – a state of dizziness, nausea, *extreme thirst* . . .

And low blood pressure due to excessive blood *loss*; He was bloodied

And the purpose, was to literally render the victim half dead, so as to shorten the time of death on the cross; But not to kill them
That was considered a failure on the part of the lictors, the “whippers”; They were to bring the person right to the edge
No wonder he couldn’t carry the cross*****

And so, combined with the multiple blows to his face by the soldiers, and the crown of thorns on his head, and the spitting, and the cross to top it off . . .
It’s pretty easy to see how that could so mar someone as to render them unrecognizable and inhuman; A direct fulfillment of Is 52:14
And the first reason that Jesus is the one of whom this speaks

➤ The second, is that he was humble; Just like it says in Phil 2:5-11
The Apostle Paul is writing, and says . . .
[5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [a thing to be held on to], [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Don’t miss the connection here, with Isaiah; Paul was *educated* in the OT, and I can’t help but think that he had Isaiah 52 in mind when he wrote this
It’s not just any old servant, or a generic servant that Jesus took the form of – but *God’s* servant; The *suffering* servant

[8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death [starting with the scourging], even death on a cross.
High and *lifted up* on a cross; Just like Jesus himself said it in **Jn 3:14-15**
As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man [the Messiah] be lifted up; It’s Isaiah 52 through and through
A fulfillment they couldn’t have imagined in his day
[15] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Jesus acted wisely and did what’s best, by *humbling* himself as a *suffering* servant, in order to accomplish God’s purpose of offering us life*****

➤ *[9] Therefore God has highly exalted him [My servant shall be exalted God said] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth [referring to those who have already died], [11] and every tongue confess [no longer speechless] that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

It was through the shocking methods of suffering, death, and humility – that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy to the letter
Accomplishing God’s purposes, and sitting at his right hand forever and ever

The only response to which, at least the only legitimate one, is . . .

Response: Humility and submission (Phil 2:10-11)

Just like Phil 2 says – *[9] God has highly exalted [his suffering servant,] [10] so that at [his name] every knee should bow [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

That’s humility – bending the knee; Acknowledging his greatness, and your need
The very thing I want to give *you* an opportunity to do as we close

And that’s submission – confessing Jesus as Lord of your life
Saying with your mouth – “Jesus, I’m following *you*; I’m doing what *you* want; You’re in the driver’s seat, not me”
“I’m going to *live* your way, I’m going to *think* your way; I’m going to *talk* your way;
And I’m going to order my life around you and your purposes”
That’s submission to the Lordship of Christ

Far from just an amazing piece of information – the fulfillment of this prophecy should cause us to *humble* ourselves, and bend the knee in *submission* (**Summary**)
And there’s no better time to do so than now
To come forward, kneel, pray – and recommit yourself to the one who suffered and bled on your behalf

It doesn’t matter if you’ve been walking with the Lord for 2 years or 20; If your humility is lacking, or your submission has waned – make it right; Bend the knee
And renew your commitment to the Lordship of Jesus

Let’s do that now as the worship team plays; And at the appropriate time, I’ll close us in prayer (come forward to kneel)

Prayer – Lord, we humbly surrender ourselves to you, and submit to your Lordship in our lives; Thank you for all you endured to secure our salvation and accomplish the Father’s purpose; We love you, and want to live for you more and more
So receive our tithes, and help us to use them to the utmost