



# 05

## SESSION FIVE

---

# Isaiah Prophecies About a Suffering Servant

### SESSION SUMMARY

---

Hundreds of years before Christ was born, Isaiah prophesied about a mysterious Servant who would be rejected and despised, and bring salvation through His suffering. The early Christians believed this prophecy was made about Jesus and His life and work. As those who benefit from the service and suffering of Jesus, we now embrace a life of suffering and service on behalf of others.

### SCRIPTURE

---

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

# THE POINT

---

**Salvation comes through the suffering of God's chosen servant.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

---

### Option 1

Rising to a massive 29,035 feet, Mount Everest holds the undisputed position of being the highest point on earth, rising 5½ miles above sea level. Standing on top of the majestic mountain makes climbers feel like they are on top of the world, with one foot in China and the other in Tibet. With winds exceeding 100 miles per hour and temperatures of -76 degrees Fahrenheit, even those who glimpse the unrivaled beauty of Everest's summit cannot do so for long. There is simply more beauty than any single person can appreciate surrounding this majestic treasure of the East.<sup>1</sup>

Ascending from the pages of the Old Testament, Isaiah 53 stands as a spiritual Mount Everest pointing to the glory of Christ and the hope of eternal salvation. As we journey up this mountain, we encounter a prophetic picture all of us can appreciate, but none of us can exhaust. Despite being written 700 years before Jesus died on Golgotha's hill, these verses position the reader at the foot of the cross and expound on the gospel by showing us the truth of substitutionary atonement.

- **What is the tallest mountain or highest elevation you have ever visited? What do you recall about that experience?**

### Option 2

As you begin the session instruct students to think about the word *character*. Ask them what they typically think of when they hear the word *character* and allow a few minutes for them to respond.

- **What are some characteristics that make you more likely to trust others? What characteristics might cause you not to trust another person?**

Then, read aloud the following quote from Arthur Pink: "The permanence of God's character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises."<sup>2</sup> In other words, because of who God is, we can trust Him.

- **How does it affect you to know that because of who He is, God will fulfill His promises to His people?**

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, the promised Messiah, about 700 years before Jesus' crucifixion. These verses help prepare our hearts for the gospel by showing us the need for a substitute to die for our sins in our place, and what that substitute would be like. Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice calls us to live differently.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

---

**Salvation comes through the suffering of God's chosen servant.**

## CHARACTERS

---

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Isaiah** - prophet of God who is most known for his prophecies of the coming Messiah
- **The Suffering Servant** - a title referring to Jesus and the prophecies He would fulfill

## PLOT

---

As we continue looking into the life and ministry of the prophet Isaiah, we come to see that he not only had a personal encounter with God in the temple—one that would forever change his life—but he also had the privilege of catching a glimpse into the type of person the coming Messiah would be. With remarkable detail, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would not only have the characteristics of a king, but also those of a suffering servant.

## TIMELINE

### ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

*Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.*

### GOD RESCUES JUDAH

*God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.*

### HOSEA AND GOMER

*God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.*

## THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS REJECTED

Scholars from every generation have celebrated the beauty and marveled over the prophetic accuracy of Isaiah 53. Consisting of five stanzas, this passage is the fourth song in Isaiah, a song that helps us understand God's servant, the Messiah.

In talking about these events, Isaiah employed the technique of using the past tense to communicate certainties about the suffering of the Messiah, even though the events had not yet occurred. Before listing the various ways Jesus would experience agony on the cross, the first stanza contrasts His final victory with the atrocities of His crucifixion. It is as if the pain of these verses is so horrific that Isaiah wants us to know how the story ends before we begin.

**Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (Isa. 52:13-15)**

When we read Isaiah 53 today, we see it as referring ultimately to Jesus Christ. However, the original audience would have identified this mysterious "Servant" with God's chosen people—Israel. At other points in this book, Isaiah refers to Israel as God's servant (41:8). But the mystery deepens as we keep reading, and we begin to realize that this particular prophecy's meaning cannot be solely identified with Israel, because Isaiah describes the servant as someone who will die as a substitute for God's people.

**Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 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. 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. (Isa. 53:1-3)**

The Jews of Jesus' day were hoping for a Messiah who would be a king with the power to conquer their enemies. Instead, Isaiah predicted a servant who would be "despised" and "rejected," without "impressive form" and "majesty."

### Christ as Substitute

---

*At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system, which provided a picture of humanity's need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an innocent sacrifice. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the redemption of humanity from sin.*

## THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS A SUBSTITUTE

---

Next, Isaiah's song unveils for us the reason Jesus is often unattractive to those who encounter Him. Because God's Servant had to bear everything we would like to change about ourselves, His lack of beauty is the direct result of our ugly lives. With pinpoint precision, Isaiah describes for us the events of the cross before they occurred. The Servant became a suffering substitute for us.

**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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. 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. 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. 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? 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. (Isa. 53:4-9)**

Seeking to highlight the Servant's substitution for all people, Isaiah repeatedly used the words "we," "us," and "our" to communicate that we are the beneficiaries of His work and also guilty for these crimes.

But why do we need a substitute? You may recall that when Adam and Eve chose to sin, humanity was left reeling under the curse of their transgression (Rom. 5:12-14). Destined to die as a result, the only hope for salvation is that our sentence of condemnation be taken away. By dying on the cross, Jesus paid the debt we owe for our inherited nature and personal actions. Rather than ignore our sin and deny His holiness, God chose to take our punishment upon Himself through the person of His Son in order to remove our sins completely.

Thus, Jesus bore our sicknesses and pain because they are a result of the curse (Isa. 53:4). God the Father pierced and crushed Him for our transgressions and iniquities so that we could enjoy peace (53:5). Because all people are like wayward sheep deserving of death (53:6; Rom. 3:23), God the Father placed the weight of our wickedness upon Christ. Jesus stood in our place and not only became sin, but also faced the consequence of sin (2 Cor. 5:21). He was cut off from the land of living because the wages of sin is death (53:8; Rom. 6:23).

## THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS EXALTED

As predicted in his introductory stanza, Isaiah concludes his song by describing the Servant's work on our behalf with the exaltation and victory it brings.

**Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. 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. (Isa. 53:10-12)**

In case anyone would falsely believe that these atrocities against the Messiah were accidental, we learn that God not only orchestrated the whole affair, but also that He was pleased to do so. The greater good produced by Jesus' willing substitution far outweighed His agony and pain. Because He was victorious over sin and death, Jesus is exalted over all the earth with a name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9-11). In addition to receiving the glory that He clearly earned, we receive atonement and forgiveness that we do not deserve. Because Jesus willingly became an offering for sin (John 10:17-18), God the Father rewards Him.

- **Have you ever thought of yourself as a reward to Christ for His work on the cross? How does this change your desire to live for Him?**  
(p. 36, PSG)

## TIMELINE

### JONAH

*God goes to great lengths for people to hear the good news of salvation.*

### JOEL

*A prophet who warns God's people about the Day of the Lord.*

### JEREMIAH

*God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

---

Though New Testament followers of Jesus did not initially believe that God's Son would need to suffer in these ways (Mark 8:31-34), after the death and resurrection of Jesus, they recognized whom this song truly pointed to. In addition to the obvious parallels between the Gospel accounts and these words, six different New Testament authors apply these verses to Jesus in eight different places (Matt. 8:17; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 5:31; Acts 8:32-35; Rom. 10:16; 15:21; 1 Pet. 2:22-24).

How does Jesus' substitution help us? Two phrases demonstrate the monumental impact of Jesus becoming our substitute. First, "upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace" This tells us that Jesus' sacrifice restored our peace with God, making a relationship with Him possible.

Second, Isaiah says, "with his wounds we are healed." This "healing" primarily refers to the spiritual restoration and health Christ's substitution makes possible. In His earthly ministry Jesus often relieved the symptoms of the fall (sickness, pain, death), but on the cross Jesus removed the source of our greatest problem by atoning for our sins. As wonderful as temporary physical healing is, the focus of Isaiah 53 is the final victory we receive as a result of His substitution. Fully healed from the disease of rebellion, we can experience the reality of peace with God.

Because Jesus stands in our place in order to take our sin away, we are free to stand in His place and enjoy the peace of righteousness that is not our own. Jesus not only removed our guilt, but He also imparted His innocence to us. Our salvation is possible because, as our substitute, Jesus removes our sins and assigns His righteousness to us.

# YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does the fact that these prophecies were recorded hundreds of years before the birth of Christ strengthen your faith in the reliability of Scripture?** *For people questioning the authority and/or reliability of the Bible, fulfilled prophecies such as this one can be an incredible source of assurance that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.*
- **In what ways have we gone astray like sheep in our own lives?** *Answers will vary.*
- **After having gone through this session, how would you answer someone who asks you why we need a substitute for our sins?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What is something new this session taught you regarding God and His desire to rescue His people?** *Though answers will vary, it may be helpful for students to think about this question in light of the different members of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all having a role in redemption as seen in these passages.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*



# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

---

A Savior who appears to be nobody is not very appealing to the masses who are desperate to be somebody. If Jesus is not a ticket to a better life now, most will find no value in following Him. We falsely assume that no one would humble himself intentionally, especially God. But make no mistake—the final exaltation of Christ will leave unbelievers, both Jew and Gentile alike, shocked when they consider the truth of Jesus in light of their previous notions of Him.

- **What are ways people mentally re-create Jesus today in order to make Him more appealing?** *For instance, people make Jesus out to be merely a moral teacher whose only message was about loving others. While loving others was certainly a part of Jesus' message, His words on love have to be understood in light of the undeserved grace of God given to a rebellious people like ourselves.*
- **How do these “re-creations” distract us from the primary work that Jesus came to do?** *Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost—us. Re-creations that don't take into account the fact that Jesus came to redeem a sinful people through His substitutionary death can, in the end, distract us from the reason He came.*



## HEART

---

People who fear that salvation is unattainable or question whether they can be saved can reassure themselves that Jesus' work on the cross is an expression of His love toward all people (Rom. 5:8). No sinner is out of reach (Isa. 59:1), and no saint can forfeit the safety of the Savior's steady hand (John 10:28).

- **How encouraging is it to know the Servant lives to intercede for His people?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can this session encourage you in your own faith, especially if you have had doubts about your own salvation?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

---

Since God loved us enough to offer His Son as a Suffering Servant, how should we respond? What kind of lives should we live in light of such a sacrifice? For starters, we should not dare to squander such a costly sacrifice on our behalf. Christianity is more than a one-time decision, after which we choose to live independently of God. Accepting Christ's death also requires yielding to His life (Gal. 2:20). Just as Jesus sought to obey His Father in all things, we too, must die to ourselves so that He might live through us as we eagerly spread the good news that salvation is available to all.

- **How should the knowledge that God demonstrated His love in the substitution of His Son impact your daily decisions?** *In short, God's undeserved love and salvation should always motivate us to be more like Christ in our daily actions and dealings with others.*
- **What are some things you need to “die” to and submit to God in your own life in response to the Servant's dying on your behalf?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

---

### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #6, which contains an informational chart of some of Isaiah's Messianic prophecies and how Jesus fulfilled them.

### **SOURCES**

1. Stephen Venables, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Mount Everest," accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Everest>.
2. Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 49.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron](http://lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at  
**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**