

Despising the Shame (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

We've spent our Sundays this summer in a series entitled, "*Hero: Jesus in the Old Testament*." Jesus said the whole Bible is about Him; He is the hero of the story of how God rescues us and creation from evil and death: He is the theme which ties the whole Bible together because God intended for it to be read as one seamless story about Christ. So far we've learned a lot about the identity of the hero of the Bible but we don't yet know how He will save us. That's what we'll learn this morning as we look at Isaiah 52:13-52:12; which is one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible. 700 years before Christ, we see the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah; which is why this chapter is one of the most quoted Old Testament passages in the New Testament. It is quoted or alluded to in each of the gospels, in Acts and in many of the other books of the New Testament because it goes directly to the heart of the gospel; Christ suffers for us so that we might share in His glory.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah focus on the judgment that is about to fall on Israel for centuries of idolatry and rebellion against God when they will be conquered and taken out the Promised Land as captives to Babylon. The other 27 chapters from Isaiah 40-66 are about salvation and divide neatly into three nine chapter sections. The first 9 chapters are about salvation from Babylon and how God will bring Israel back to their land. The middle 9 chapters are about salvation from sin and how God will save not only Israel but all the nations of the world from their sins and the final 9 chapters are about the salvation of the entire creation from evil and death as God restores it and us to what He originally intended. This morning's passage is from the middle section about how God will save us from sin; and is the fourth of four songs about someone God calls "My Servant." In the first servant song of Isaiah 42:1-9 God speaks of His selection of His servant who will bring justice to the nations of the earth – not by force but quietly and patiently, opening blind eyes and bringing prisoners out of prison. The second Servant song is found in Isaiah 49:1-6 and is sung by the Servant Himself about how God calls Him before He is born to bring salvation to the end of the earth; and yet he is rejected and seems to fail in that mission. In the third servant song in Isaiah 50:4-9 the servant is described as both a disciple and a disciple-maker who sustains the weary with His word which He receives each morning from God and who although He will be beaten and abused, will follow the path God places him on without retreat and whose success depends upon God. So the first three servant songs raise the question, "How can God's servant bring salvation to the ends of the earth if He is rejected and abused by the very people to whom God sends Him? This is the mystery this fourth servant song solves. How can the servant of the Lord save people from their sins if they reject and kill Him? The answer to that question is at the heart of the gospel and this morning I want to look at three things. In chapter 52:13-15, we'll look at the mystery of God's Servant and the answer to this mystery. Then chapter 53 explains this answer as it reveals both the suffering of God's servant in vs. 1-9 and the success of God's servant in vs. 10-12.

Lamp: challenge butter: Now what should we get out of this passage? Two things: admiration and imitation. This passage begins and ends with the exaltation of Jesus and if we really understand what God says about His Son in this passage, we will admire and worship Jesus as well. And the more we admire Him, the more we'll be drawn to imitate Him because that's what a disciple does. A disciple is a student who attaches himself or herself to a master in order to become like their master and that is God's goal for every Christian; to make us like Jesus. You see, happiness is not the result of what we attain or what we accomplish; happiness is the result of who we become. The two most important questions we can ask are, "What kind of person do I want to be?" and "What is the path I will take to become that person?" The disciple of Jesus answers, "I want to become like Jesus because He is who I was created to be; and the path I will take is getting to know Him better and better and following Him more and more closely." This passage reveals a lot about the character of Christ and therefore the character God wants to reproduce in each of us. So our goal this morning is to get to know Jesus better so that we will both admire Him and imitate Him more.

Let's look at the Mystery of God's Servant in vs. 13-15 and how is it possible for the Servant of the Lord to save us from sin if He is rejected? *"Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, {My people,} So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand."* (Isaiah 52:13-15) Notice that God's servant will succeed in the mission God sends Him; that he will prosper and as a result will be greatly honored. Yet the path to that success will be the path of suffering. His appearance will be marred more than any man. Because of the intense suffering He endures - torture, beatings and crucifixion – He will become so unrecognizable; that people will be astonished. But why must the path to His success be the path of suffering? God says that it will not be because of His own sin but because of the sin of His people. *"Just as many were astonished at you, My people so His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men."* The Old Testament uses this word "astonished" in conjunction with God's judgment of His own people. After Solomon completed the construction of the temple in Jerusalem, God warned him that as long as he and his sons continue to walk with God, his family will continue to rule Israel; but if Solomon or his sons or their nation turn aside from following God, God warns in I Kings 9:7-8, *"...then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them and the house which I have consecrated for My name (the temple Solomon built) I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all the peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, "What has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?"* - exactly what the first 39 chapters of Isaiah say are about to happen. God will judge His people, the temple will be destroyed and the nation will be taken away captive; and those who observe it will be astonished at what happens to the people who desert their God. So this kind of astonishment is not the astonishment of wonder but of revulsion. It's "how could these people be so stupid to ignore God for centuries? I just don't get it." Isaiah 52 says God's Servant will experience that same kind of astonishment and revulsion because people will be amazed at how wicked He must be for God to allow the awful things which happen to Him; that God's servant will not only experience incredible suffering but incredible shame and rejection – yet He will not suffer for anything He has done but because of what His people have done – and that brings us to the third part of the answer to this mystery of how God's servant can save people from their sin if He is rejected; substitution. Notice vs. 15. Why does the servant of the Lord suffer? *"Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand."* (Isaiah 52:15) Even more astonishing than the suffering and shame God's servant will endure will be the result of His suffering. We can finally see what all those animal sacrifices which the Law of Moses commanded were pointing to. In the Old Testament, sprinkling refers to the sprinkling of either blood or water. The priest sprinkles the blood of the sacrificial animal on the altar signifying the removal of the people's sin or sprinkles a person with clean water signifying his purification. Those sprinklings were simply foreshadows of the real sprinkling that takes place as God's servant endures horrific suffering and shame so that not only can Israel be cleansed and purified of her sins but also the other nations of their sins. The servant of the Lord will suffer and die not for His own sake but as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of all people. As a result, even kings will be silent in wonder as they finally understand God's plan for the salvation of the world. Who could have imagined that God's servant would suffer so that we wouldn't have to; that He would endure our shame and punishment so that we could be forgiven? Just as many were amazed and shocked by the suffering of God's servant, so also many will be amazed and shocked by the results of His suffering. But this time it will be the astonishment of wonder and gratitude rather than revulsion. The man they despised turns out to be the man who saves them and even kings will be struck dumb in awe and worship as they finally see the wisdom of God's plan. So Isaiah 52:13-15 answers the mystery of how God's servant can save God's people from their sins if He is rejected by them. The answer is that He saves them not in spite of His rejection and suffering but because of it. His suffering is necessary for His success because He suffers not for Himself but in our place – which Isaiah 53 will now explain in detail.

Now before we move on, let's think about the implications of that for us. If Christ's success was made possible by His suffering, what does that mean for His disciples? No suffering, no glory. Suffering, hardships and obstacles are the way we become like Jesus; the classroom where we develop the character of Christ. What seems to stand in the way to what we want is actually the way to what we want. That's why Peter writes in *1 Pet 2:21* "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Peter says that the purpose of life is following Jesus and that means following Him into suffering. Greek tutors taught their young students to read and write by drawing letters in the sand which the student would then trace with his finger over and over until he could write that letter himself. The letter was called the example and that's the word Peter uses here. God's purpose for our life is to trace the path Jesus walked and to share in His suffering because that's the way we'll become like Him. Jesus had to suffer for God's mission to succeed and the same thing is true for His followers. That's why the early Christians rejoiced when they were persecuted and suffered shame for His name. That's why James writes, "Consider it all joy, my brethren when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let endurance have its perfect result so that you may be perfect, complete and lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4) Want to be perfect, (mature) complete and lacking in nothing? Want to become the person you want to be? Then get ready to suffer. It's not the good times that change us but the hard times; not our successes but our failures; not the easy way but the difficult way. That's why the most inspirational stories are never the stories of easy success but of courageous perseverance against all odds – because that is the only classroom for greatness. What if the things we resent; the difficulties, the problems, the hard work, the things which are out of our control were all necessary for us to become like Jesus? What if they are opportunities to grow in our faith and in our character? What if they are essential – like a gym or a classroom - where we learn to behave like Jesus? And what if we can never become the person God wants us to become without them? The writer to the Hebrews said that Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered and Peter says we walk the same path. For that reason we'll never be happy following Jesus until we embrace His perspective on the necessity of suffering. How do we do that? Let's see what Jesus did. Verses 13-15 of chapter 52 summarize the mystery of God's servant. Isaiah 53 now fills in the details as it further explains Christ's suffering and success.

Verses 1-9 reveal three things about the suffering God's servant will endure. First He will be unrecognized and rejected; (1-3) second, He will suffer in our place (4-6); and third He will calmly accept His suffering (7-9). Vs. 1-3 tells us the Messiah will be unrecognized and rejected by Israel. "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" This verse is quoted in both the Gospel of John and the letter to the Romans by John and Paul to explain why Jesus had to be rejected as Messiah by Israel - because Isaiah said that the true Messiah would be rejected. He won't look like the king Israel expects. "For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no {stately} form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isa. 53:1-3) Jesus didn't look like the king Israel expected. In fact He looked very ordinary. He grew up in the tiny, backwater village of Nazareth like a weed growing in the desert. He could have chosen to look like Denzel Washington or Brad Pitt but He chose to very ordinary. If people saw Jesus today, no one would choose Him on a dating web site or encourage Him to run for public office. Jesus identified Himself with us so completely that He looked like an average guy. He wasn't attractive, He was despised, a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief; a man from whom people turn away in disgust. He could have arrived in fame and glory but He chose obscurity and dishonor. He could have been the happiest man who ever lived but He chose to experience the depths of our sorrow and grief. He could have come in prosperity and power but chose instead poverty and weakness. He becomes like every man and every woman. What does that tell you about Jesus? Paul writes in *Philippians 2:3-6* in a passage obviously based on Isaiah 53, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not {merely} look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, {and} being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Paul repeats the lessons of Isaiah 53 and how we're to follow Jesus' example. In order to successfully complete the mission God gave Him, Jesus completely humbles Himself; forgetting His own interests and committing Himself wholly to God's

interests and to our interests. How do you think Jesus felt about being unrecognized and rejected? He didn't like it any more than we would. He's the creator of the universe and yet His own creation treated Him like dirt. That's why He was a man of sorrows. But He chose to not cling to His rights as God but to empty Himself of all but love for our sake. And Paul says that now He calls us to do the same; to get over ourselves and to see that God has called us to a far greater mission. I will never embrace Jesus' perspective on suffering until I embrace Christ's humility.

In the mid-1940s, Branch Rickey, president and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, began to scout the Negro leagues for a possible addition to the Dodgers' roster and asked Jackie Robinson to come in for an interview. Rickey was about to integrate professional baseball and he had to make sure the first black player in the majors could withstand the awful racial abuse he would experience. In a three-hour meeting on August 28, 1945, Rickey asked Robinson if he could face the racial hatred of the big leagues without taking the bait and reacting— especially since Robinson had a history of standing up for himself in confrontations with whites. Robinson asked, "Are you looking for a Negro who is afraid to fight back?" Rickey replied that he needed a player "with guts enough not to fight back." After obtaining a commitment from Robinson to "turn the other cheek", Rickey signed him. It turned out that Rickey underestimated the level of abuse to which Robinson would be subjected. There was an aggressive campaign to libel, provoke, injure, intimidate, maim, freeze out and even to kill Robinson. He was hit by over 72 pitches, nearly lost his Achilles tendon to players aiming their spikes at him as they slid into 2nd base, and cheated out of countless calls by umpires. He endured constant boos and racial insults from fans and players alike. Yet Robinson held to his pact with Rickey. He never reacted nor retaliated in all his years in the league. In an age when Ted Williams spit at the fans who booed him, Robinson had no such freedom. One reaction would not only have ended his career but delayed the integration of professional baseball by a generation. Robinson had to set aside his ego, his pride and his sense of fairness for a greater cause. He became an anvil and an anvil always outlasts the hammer. Our pride is our greatest obstacle in following Jesus in suffering. We hate being rejected, dismissed, misunderstood, disrespected, abused and slighted. We hate swallowing our pride, being patient and refusing to take offense because it's humiliating. "Don't you know who I am? I don't have to take this." Or we can follow Jesus and humble ourselves for the greater good. One of the major reasons Branch Rickey chose Jackie Robinson for the incredibly difficult task of integrating baseball was because both men were Bible-believing Christians. Both men believed that Jesus lived within them and that He would give them the ability to do what He would do in that situation. Isaiah says the Lord's servant will be rejected and despised – and He was. And if we follow Him, we will be as well. That's why Paul tells us to think like Jesus who humbled Himself and put the needs of others before His own.

Now in Isaiah 53:4-6, we learn a second thing about the suffering of God's servant; it will be substitutionary. He won't suffer for Himself but for us. *"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being {fell} upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him."* (Isa 53:4-6) Here is the very heart of Christianity. We are not saved by anything we do but by what Christ has done for us. Why did God's servant have to suffer in order to succeed in His mission? He suffered as our substitute to release us from our sins. He experienced our grief and sorrows. He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment we deserved fell upon Him. He was scourged that we might be healed. Like sheep, we have all gone astray; we've all done what we wanted rather than what God wanted; we've all sinned and fallen short. But rather than punish me, God punished His Son in my place - so that I might be blessed, healed and restored.

The gospel is the good news that Christ loved me and died in my place which is why vs. 7-9 of Isaiah 53 tells us that God's servant will calmly accept His suffering. *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open 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 for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?"* (Isaiah 53:7-8) Jesus bore the punishment for my sin so that I don't have to and He bore it calmly and bravely. And if I intend to follow Him, then that's a lesson I must learn; to quietly accept suffering; knowing that while men and demons may

intend it for evil, God intends it for my good. We looked at 1 Peter 2:21 a few minutes ago. Let's read it again in its context. *"For this {finds} favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer {for it} you patiently endure it, this {finds} favor with God."* It's one thing to suffer for doing what's wrong. It's another to suffer for doing what's right – for obeying God, for following Christ. Peter says that when we suffer for doing God's will we're to quietly endure it. Why? *"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting {Himself} to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."* (1 Peter 2:19-25) Peter says the application of Isaiah 53 to our lives today is to suffer like Jesus suffered; calmly and quietly accepting whatever suffering comes our way whether we think we deserve it or not – because just as Jesus' suffering was necessary for our salvation, our suffering is necessary to become like Jesus. Everybody suffers but not everybody benefits from their suffering because not everybody patiently endures suffering by faith. I know I don't. When obstacles arise, when things don't work out, when people are mean or incompetent or fail to follow through; when I suffer because of other people's mistakes, I resent it. I either get mad or just want to throw in the towel because it seems so unfair. So how could Jesus patiently endure the horrible suffering He endured? Peter tells us. *"...while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting {Himself} to Him who judges righteously;"* Jesus calmly accepted everything that happened to Him because He trusted God that God would make it right in the end and use His sufferings for both our good and His good. And that's how throughout history Jesus' followers have suffered as well; with calm and quiet acceptance. That's how Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson arrived at their strategy for integrating the major leagues and how Martin Luther King arrived at his strategy for integrating the South. Not reviling in return, not threatening, not reacting but entrusting themselves to God and accepting whatever unfair abuse they received; and as a result public opinion gradually changed as people became ashamed of the evils of segregation. So these days, whenever I begin to feel angry or stressed or fearful; rather than giving into my natural fight or flight instincts, I try to ask myself, "How would Jesus react to this situation?" If I honestly want to become like Him, I need opportunities to practice doing what He would do. How would He react when He takes the wrong exit and finds that He's lost? When He's unjustly accused? When He's misunderstood? When the worst thing that could happen happens? Seeing the daily circumstances which are out of my control as training opportunities to develop the calm and quiet acceptance of faith has been very helpful to me.

Now before we look at the success of God's servant in vs. 10-12, let's finish up this section on His suffering with vs. 9. *"His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth."* (Isaiah 53:9) Jesus died with wicked men, crucified with a two common criminals and His body would normally have been tossed into a common pit with along with theirs. Yet a wealthy follower of Jesus named Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body and buried Him in his own grave because Joseph knew that Jesus was innocent and deserved a better burial than the one the authorities planned to give to Him. Joseph's action made Jesus' resurrection far more apparent than if Jesus had been simply tossed into a pile of bodies and burnt and it is Christ's resurrection and exaltation that the final verses of Isaiah 53 reveal.

Let's look at the success of the Servant of the Lord in vs. 10-12. *"But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting {Him} to grief;"* God was pleased to crush Jesus and to cause Him grief for our sake and Jesus was pleased to be crushed. Both Father and Son endured the greatest agony and sacrifice joyfully for our sake and both are satisfied with the results. What results? *"If He would render Himself {as} a guilt offering, He will see {His} offspring, But* Jesus didn't have children – He never married. Well, the fact is that He has billions of children; new creations, children of God, people freed from sin, made new and adopted into God's family as a result of His sacrifice. Through His suffering and death, Jesus fulfills God's original command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. The seed that fell into the ground and died has borne much fruit. *"He will prolong {His} days, And the good*

pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.” But how will the Servant of the Lord see His offspring and prolong His days if He’s dead? Obviously He will have to be raised from the dead. This is a promise of Christ’s resurrection. *“As a result of the anguish of His soul, (God’s Servant) He (the Lord) will see {it and} be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.* Because Jesus suffered in our place, God’s justice is satisfied and we are justified – counted righteous by God and clothed us in Christ’s righteousness. God makes Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf so that we might become righteous. *“Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.”* (Isaiah 53:10-12). As a result of His obedience, God highly exalts the Son and gives Him the name above all names because He identified Himself with transgressors, dying in our place and interceding in our behalf before His Father. Jesus succeeds because He suffered. He is adored today by billions because He was despised. He sits at the right hand of God as king of kings and Lord of Lords because He became the servant of all. The reason Jesus could humble Himself and calmly accept all He suffered was because He believed God’s promise of what His suffering would accomplish. Hebrews 12:2 puts it this way. For the joy set before Him – all that Isaiah 53: 10-12 promises - He endured the cross, despising the shame. Hebrews 12:3 goes on to say, “For consider Him who endured such hostility of sinners against Himself so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.” There are a lot of folks at Creekside who are going through tough times right now. Seeing the outcome of what Christ endured gives us the strength to endure what we must endure. Early in His ministry, it was easy for Jesus to trust God. There were the miracles, the crowds, the attention; everybody was excited about the king and His kingdom. But the further along Jesus got, the harder things became. The opposition increased, disciples deserted, the attacks became more frequent and more intense until in the end, Jesus faced torture and the cross alone. Jesus could have surrendered to despair; but He continued to trust that what God promised would happen as a result of His suffering, God would fulfill. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame. Now we’re called to walk the same path. I know a lot of you are going through incredibly difficult things; things you never would have imagined having to experience when you were younger. We can despair because life hasn’t turned out the way we hoped or we can trust that there is no unnecessary suffering in our life, that as Paul says, the sufferings of this life aren’t worthy to be compared with the glory that is to come; that there is a reason for everything we go through and that if we knew everything that God knows, we would choose for things to turn out exactly the way they have. God has not only promised Jesus a glorious future, He’s made the same promise to us. If we suffer with Him, we will share His glory. That means we don’t despair or question or give up, but we calmly endure what God gives us to endure because we believe that He causes all things to work for the good for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. Will you believe today that God loves you and trust Him? That’s really all it means to be a Christian. If a man loves me enough to die for me, I can trust Him.