



Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

A Study of the Messiah - The Suffering Servant -

Throughout one long section of the book of Isaiah, chapters 40–55, God speaks of His “servant.”

Though many people struggled to understand the identity of the servant, it was clear that he represented an individual whom God would send to elevate God’s people. The question was: how?

For those of us living on the future side of the cross, we have no question that this Servant is Jesus Christ, and that He elevated the people by saving them from their sins and establishing a Messianic kingdom! The New Testament writers make His identity plain (compare Isaiah 42:1–4 to Matthew 12:18, Isaiah 42:6 to Luke 2:32, Isaiah 53:4 to Matthew 8:17, etc.). When the Ethiopian eunuch quoted Isaiah 53:7–8, the evangelist Philip “opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35).

Knowing that the “Servant” of Isaiah 40–55 is Jesus Christ shows us some amazing truths about the nature of the Messiah’s work, and what He expects of His followers today. Isaiah 42:1–4 teaches us that Jesus spreads justice and righteousness to all the

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nations of earth, and does so in the most gentle way. Isaiah 49:5–7 teaches us that Jesus it has never been God’s intention to save only Israel, but instead to save all mankind through the Messiah.

Isaiah 53 reveals that God would cause His Servant to suffer as a sacrificial offering for the people. This is a shocking idea! While many Jews were expecting the Messiah to be a conquering general, Isaiah 53 depicts the Messiah as lowly, rejected, and crushed. Verse 2 begins,

He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

God’s Messiah was born in a stable to a poor family and spent His first night in a feeding trough. Despite centuries of artwork, we don’t know what Jesus looked like—His physical features were probably those of an unremarkable Jewish man. He didn’t clothe Himself majestically or draw attention to Himself through charm and splendor.

Those looking for a hero charging on a white stallion and brandishing a gleaming sword were disappointed. Jesus did not defeat the Roman occupiers of Palestine; in fact, He died on a Roman cross. But those who heard and accepted His word knew that He carried the sword of the Spirit (Heb. 4:12). Those looking for a pampered king dressed in purple robes were disappointed. The only regal clothing he wore was a crown of thorns beaten onto His head and a fake scepter thrust into His hand in mockery. But those who saw Jesus’ true nature as the Son of God accepted Him as Lord and Master, the one who freed them from slavery to sin, the one who rules over their lives (Col. 1:13–20).

Verse 3 continues,

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.

Royalty usually ignore the problems of man, and surround themselves with high palace walls in which pleasure reigns. Not Jesus, the Prince

of Peace. He acquainted Himself with grief, enduring His own troubles, and bearing the troubles of others. Though men hid their faces from Him, Jesus turned away from no one who was sick, downtrodden, or needy. He was touched by the heartaches of man, weeping at the death of a friend (John 11:33–36), and moved to act by the pleas of a woman for her daughter (Matt. 15:21–28, *cf.* 9:35–36). Despite His great kindness and compassion, “He was despised and forsaken” (see John 1:11, Luke 4:29, 17:25, 23:18).

Verses 4–6 become more specific about His willing sacrifice,

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,
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.

The greatest truth of the Bible, the most important theme in the gospel, indeed the centerpiece of all God’s revelation to mankind, is that Jesus Christ died for our sins (1 Peter 1:18–19, Rom. 5:6–9). What an amazing love God has shown to us!

Verse 7 says,

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.

Jesus stood before the Jewish high priest and the scribes and elders, and heard all sorts of ridiculous accusations and false testimony (Matthew 26:60), “but Jesus kept silent” (26:63). Jesus stood before Herod and

Pilate “and He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge” (27:14). Jesus said nothing when they spat upon Him and beat Him and mocked Him. Jesus endured even the anguish of the cross with tranquility and silence, refusing to answer back to those who chided Him. At any moment, He could have destroyed His aggressors with a wave of the hand (Matt. 26:53). But He did not, and gave Himself to save even His enemies.

In the end, after all this vicarious suffering, God exalted His Servant. Verses 10–13 say,

He will see His offspring,
He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.
As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied...
Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong.

Jesus never married and had physical children, but the phrase “His offspring” refers to His children who are in the church, a spiritual posterity begotten through His word (Philem. 10), a house given to Him by God (Heb. 2:13b).

“As a result” of His great sacrifice, God raised Him up and glorified Him. Phil. 2:9–10 would make a fitting conclusion, to see how God transformed the suffering of the Savior into the very cause of His reign:

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

—*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“A fool tells what he plans to do; a boaster tells what he has done before; a wise man does it and says nothing.”

—*author unknown*