

Isaiah 53:1-3

Isaiah 53 introduces us to the Suffering Servant, showing how severe the suffering would be and that it would be for our redemption. While Isaiah was very clear about the suffering of the Servant, the idea really met with resistance among the people in general. It was not popular in Isaiah's day and as time went on it grew less and less acceptable. The Jews were looking for a Messiah who would be a King, who would reign, who would re-establish the throne of David. By the time of Jesus there was hardly a man who conceived the Messiah as a Suffering Servant.

The question was how a man who knew nothing but suffering could rescue those who were suffering. How could a man who would die hope to bring life to a dying people? How could a man who would be bruised and broken of body bring healing to others? It seemed then, and to many today, incredible. Yet that was the message of Isaiah. It is the message of Jesus and of the Cross.

Read Isaiah 53:1-3. Note that most of the verbs are not in the future tense as one might expect but in the past. That is not because the events had already taken place but is an example of what is called the Prophetic Perfect tense. When a Prophet was given a prophetic message he often saw it so clearly that it appeared to him as if it had already taken place. Think about how dramatic, how vivid, and how certain this vision must have been. The idea of a Suffering Servant was not some abstract theological concept but a vivid image of love suffering beyond measure for us.

Isaiah began with the declaration that the message he was about to deliver was so incredible it was easy to see why no one would believe it. The whole story of God's love for us and of the redemption He purchased at Calvary is beyond what we can really comprehend.

Verse 2 makes several general but important observations. First, **He grew up before Him**: The "Him" clearly points to God. Peter tells us that while Jesus was rejected by men He was chosen by God and precious. Although He was the Servant who was the suffering one and would be despised and rejected of men He lived His entire earthly life being watched over by God. God's hand was always upon Him. His footsteps always ordered by God. His life and His death were no accident, no mistake, and no miscalculation but always before a watching and permitting Father. Consider how the Father must have felt watching what men were doing to His Son and how He felt when His Son took upon Himself our sin and because of that the Father had to turn His back on Him.

Isaiah said He was like **a tender plant**: The picture is that of a suckling, a tiny twig that grows out of another tree. Men regularly prune trees of them, cutting them off with the idea that in so doing they save the tree and get rid of that which is useless. In the eyes of the world Jesus was of no value and actually a threat to society. In truth they could not know how much this one "suckling" would mean to humanity, both in time and eternity. In reality the shoot that was growing out of the dead tree of Israel was the Redeemer.

He was **as a root out of dry ground**: In dry ground a root must struggle to survive. The very existence of a plant in dry ground is threatened. Dry ground does not promise growth or fruit; that seems all but impossible. Who would have believed that out of Bethlehem, out of a manger, out of a carpenter shop could come the Messiah? How could one of such lowly birth and position accomplish what He did? The world would find no reason to follow Him, but He was God's servant and He would provide the opportunity for redemption for all who would believe.

Isaiah said **when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him**: Isaiah was not talking about physical beauty. It was a more general statement. Men are drawn to others of high esteem, of position, of wealth, of influence and Jesus had none of these. Because He did not accomplish what men thought was important they did not want Him. Because He would not overthrow Rome, He was rejected. He came not to bring might, wealth, power, influence etc. but rather love, peace, joy, kindness, contentment, so He was despised by the world. Yet He is loved by all of us who have trusted Him and know in fact that He brings that which the world could never bring.

In verse 2 we have the negative description of the Servant. He had no form, no glory, no appearance etc. Now the same thing is going to be positively stated in verse 3. He is despised, rejected, a man of sorrow, familiar with suffering.

He is despised: Rather than accepting the Servant as the one who had come from God, the Servant was scorned and subjected to all levels of contempt by the very people He had come to redeem. In Genesis 25:34 we find that same word "despised" used and there we read that Esau despised his birthright." Esau rejected it, disregarded it, considered it of no value. All around us are those who reject Jesus even today. The world sometimes says it is indifferent to Him but one cannot be indifferent when one talks of Jesus. He is either Lord or nothing. He is either accepted or despised. Jesus said, "He who is not for me is against me."

He is **rejected of men**: Literally forsaken. Read John 1:11. He was seen as having no value and so He was rejected by those whom He came to redeem through His suffering. No where is this more vividly pictured than when Jesus was being tried and Pilot asks the crowd what he should do with Him. The crowd shouted in rejection of Him, "Crucify Him, give us Barabbas." It's not that simple. To rid oneself of Jesus is to rid oneself of hope. To reject the giver of life is to reject life. Yet men still do just that.

In some ways it is easy to reject Jesus, although it is so costly in the long run. Rejecting Him absolves one of all responsibility to Him while accepting Him causes us to surrender all. We have a choice. Pilate asked "What shall I do with him?" Today God asks us "What will you do with Him?" Will we reject His lordship or will we accept Him, and with that acceptance discover anew how much His suffering provided for us?

And **He was a man of sorrows**: What a title. The hymn writer what ought to be our feelings when he wrote, "Man of sorrow what a name, for the Son of God who came, ruined sinners to

reclaim. Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood. Guilty, vile and helpless we. Spotless Lamb of God was He. Full atonement can it be? Lifted up was He to die, it is finished was His cry, Man of Sorrows, what a name!

What would you like on your tombstone? Here lies a nice person, a kind person, a loving friend, the best parent. On Jesus' tomb, had He not risen, would be these words, "Here lies a man of sorrow." That is what His life was all about. He came to suffer and to die..

He was **familiar with suffering**: The actual Hebrew was often used as an analogy for sin. He was acquainted with sin. He did not participate in sin, but the pure, righteous, holy, perfect, sinless God came to a sin sick world, lived among sin and sinners and actually took upon Himself the sins of others. That is real love.

But Isaiah was not finished. He said "**We hid our faces from Him.**" Literally they were ashamed of Him. Sometimes as Christians we fall into that same trap. Something is said that deserves an expression of faith on our part and we remain silent. Or perhaps we don't speak up when we know we should. We justify our silence in some way so as to make it sound like it was the best thing to do. Too often we buy into the lie of Satan that our faith is personal and should be kept that way.

Still Jesus cries out even in His suffering, "I love you and want you to love me in return. I left glory to bear your sins so you could live with me forever. I want you to acknowledge Me before men so I can acknowledge you before my Father."

Consider the fact that since we have been loved with such a love, shouldn't we love Him in return? Since He paid so great a price for our redemption, shouldn't we live for Him and serve Him? If others hide their faces from Him shouldn't we speak up? He is worthy of our faith and acknowledgement before all.