

Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 33, Isaiah 53

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 33, Isaiah 53.

All right, I'm ready to begin.

Let's have a word of prayer, please. Father, another day we thank you for the beauty of it. I thank you, Lord, for this campus, for what goes on here and stretching our minds to think Christianly on every discipline.

Guide us this hour, help us understand the things that we study. Thank you for Isaiah's message, which echoes throughout time. I pray that we will be able to take the main themes and emphases that are timeless and build them into our own lives. We thank you that this is the Word of God. I ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

All right, just a reminder, we made a correction on the exam. We made that correction early in the semester. So, just to make sure we're all on the same page, 2:30 Monday afternoon the 16th.

We all agreed on that. 2:30 Monday afternoon the 16th. Okay. Today, I want to finish Isaiah 53 and then briefly touch on one other servant song in chapter 61.

Then, on Monday and Wednesday, I'm going to, next week, talk about some of the favorite texts scattered throughout the book of Isaiah that emphasize a number of things that are key points to understanding spirituality, theology, ethics, and some of the lasting things that have guided people through the book. Some of the other texts that we haven't been able to systematically go through. So, for today, I want to finish up, first of all, on chapter 53, in which we talk about the renown of his sufferings.

In other words, the fame, the illustrious report of his sufferings. And we left off toward the end of this section, speaking about the power or the might of the Lord, namely the arm of the Lord being revealed. This one who would grow up in Israel is depicted here as being like a shootout of dry ground.

Came from an obscure peasant family, if you will. They were construction workers up in the Galilee. They were not blue bloods.

And from royalty as the world would count that. And he had no majesty or splendor. In other words, this earthly servant would lack that admiration of the world.

There's nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. That is Isaiah and his countrymen. Not rich, not famous, not powerful.

Coming from this rather peasant family in Nazareth. And here again, we're dealing with the servant of the Lord. One of the main themes from the Bible is God delights in working with the little guy, the obscure, the one who is insignificant by worldly standards.

Little Israel becomes the voice to give the greatest revelation the world has ever known. A ragtag group of shepherd farmers, slaves for 400 years. And they confound the world as opposed to the Egyptians who had anatomy, physiology, writing, pyramid building, and all those things established long before Abraham.

Or Mesopotamia that worked in square roots, had all kinds of artistic and poetical achievements. A highly lettered and cultured civilization and yet God uses little obscure Israel. And once again this suffering servant motif.

This man of sorrows, as the next verse puts it. An expression picked up in hymnology. Perhaps he is speaking of his own physical and mental burdens, but more likely, the fact he is a man given to these things.

We have the possibility in these kinds of constructions of having, as it were, a subject genitive or an objective type of genitive. That is, if I said the love of God, a subject genitive would be the love that God produces, God's love for others. An objective genitive construction if I said the love of God, the love of God toward others who are the object of that love.

For the love of God, do it. Because of your love toward God, do it. That's objective genitive.

Here being a man of sorrows, yes he did suffer, yes he was despised and it could refer indeed to his own physical burdens. But he also gave himself as the suffering servant toward the relief of these things because there were three or four main areas that Jesus spent most of his time in. Teaching ministry, preaching ministry, and healing ministry.

And when you think of those he healed, the demons he cast out, the dead he raised, there is a sense in which that objective genitive, he gave his life for the relief of these things. The founder of our school even argued that there is healing in the atonement. Now, some people would see the atonement as Christ's work in acquiring salvation purely for people.

There are others that see the atonement of Christ having beneficial healing, relieving of pain and sickness toward others. And giving relief to those who are sick. Not just

sick from sin, which is the main emphasis I think we tend to put on atonement, but also emotional sickness and physical sickness.

So, how extensively you want to press this, there are a number of possibilities. He was one then who was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. In regard to himself and obviously in terms of his ministry in relation to others.

Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Now, it's interesting this expression, Hester Panim, occurs a little more than 30 times in the Hebrew Bible. Hester means to turn, and Panim is Hebrew for face.

The turning of the face is an interesting idiom. In virtually every place in the Hebrew Bible, the turning of the face is used. It's used by Yahweh, who turns his face.

It's God who hides his face. It's a distinctive feature of God in his relation to humankind. Usually associated with Israel's sin or his disappointment in Israel's disobedience.

So, he turns his face. Here however it seems to be applied to the servant as its subject. Which as one scholar writing on Isaiah suggests, the suffering servant is here to be identified with God himself.

The second emphasis in the servant song is upon the reason for his sufferings. Chapter 53, verses 4-6. Now, here we come to an emphasis that is very strong in the New Testament, which is picked up concerning Christ's suffering and his death.

Christian theology, particularly in the more conservative wing of the church, develops as vicarious atonement. V-I-C-A-R, the vicar is from a Latin root meaning substitute. So, when we talk about vicarious atonement, we're talking about someone who steps up and takes the sinner's place.

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, Paul says. And so the emphasis here is this suffering servant is going to be doing something here on behalf of others. And so look for the word our or we.

Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. And here is this idea of the servant who bears the sins, sicknesses, griefs, and pains of others. And that's precisely Matthew who grabs hold of, latches hold of this text.

Matthew 8:16 and 17. Jesus had many demon-possessed people brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with the word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah.

He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases. So, an actual citation in Matthew from Isaiah 53, 4. Again, the emphasis is upon our sicknesses, which can be both physical or mental, or anything that is debilitating. Verse 5, he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

This is the very verse that flashes on the screen as Mel Gibson begins his passion for Christ. Now, in making this blockbuster Hollywood film, notice how he dips back into the Old Testament to point out, as the gospel writers do, that Jesus' death as the suffering servant is indeed prophetically announced. And while there is no concept of a suffering Messiah in the Old Testament per se, the Messiah's name is never associated with the suffering servant.

You have to wait till you come into the Christian tradition and to the New Testament to link those concepts together. There is in the Old Testament a Son of Man, there is a Messiah, there is a suffering servant, and Jesus who came to identify with the servant his first time around to suffer and to die. This was his centerpiece, not to throw out Rome and to reign in the typical political sense of that word. He chose this image to identify with, and for almost all in the masses, he surprised them.

Why? Because they're just like we are. You identify with a political leader today more with your own personal existential needs. If you're paying too high gas prices, you want Donald Trump in there, who's going to trump everybody, according to Trump's words, and he's going to bring down the gas prices.

If that's his platform and you have a 70-mile commute to work every day, there's your candidate. If it's a crime on the streets, there's a candidate who's running big on that issue. That's what you can relate to, and the others you're not going to identify with as much.

If it's inflation, then you're going to go with another candidate who's the big businessman and knows how to run a corporation and knows how to slice out the fat and get the economy moving again. I'm simply saying we relate to what we feel is good for us personally. And who wanted a suffering servant when the Jewish people were writhing under the heel of Rome? And so, to look at the language of Isaiah 53 and to equate this was difficult indeed for most.

Mel Gibson then emphasizes the fact he would be pierced. The word is used in Psalm 22:16, Zechariah 12:10, which means to be utterly crushed. We sometimes have it translated as bruised for our iniquities or transgressions.

So, we have two parallel words here in verse 6. Transgressions and iniquities. In other words, he will be suffering not for his own sins but taking upon himself the sins of others. Behold the Lamb of God, says John the mikvah man, John the baptizer, who takes away the sins of the world.

Speaking of sheep, in the next verse, we all like sheep have gone astray. Now, there's a lot of material in the Hebrew Bible about sheep because they tend very easily to be helpless and get lost.

Look at Ezekiel 34.4-6. Ezekiel 34 deals with shepherds and sheep, and it says, You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays from the flock or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

So, they were scattered because there was no shepherd. And when they were scattered, they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill.

They were scattered over the whole earth and no one searched or looked for them. Sort of anticipates the 90 and 9, does it not, from Luke's Gospel in the New Testament. The lost sheep.

So, we, like sheep, are lost. We're helpless. We're in need of a shepherd.

As 1 Peter 2:25 puts it, the shepherd of our souls. Each has turned to his own way. Everyone has preferred their own pathway rather than God's pathway.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. I think this quite likely harks back to what happens on Yom Kippur, Leviticus 16. The emphasis on the Lord laying on him the iniquity of us all.

What happened on the holiest day of the year? It says four times in chapter 16, people are to afflict themselves. Historically, that's been understood as fasting. But part of the ceremony involved two goats.

One was killed in the camp. There was another goat that was taken outside the camp and eventually pushed off one of the hills of Judah. But before that happened, it says the high priest, verse 21 of chapter 16, is to lay both hands on the head of the goat, Azazel, and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites.

So here again, the laying on of hands, which first starts in the Bible when Moses has a successor, and Joshua is commissioned through the laying on of hands. Smicha, a word found in the Hebrew Bible and is still used every day today around the world in the Jewish communities, refers to the ordination to the ministry and the realization the early church has the laying on of hands to ordain to the ministry has a very early tradition within the community of faith. Often, it's symbolically transferring something to something else, whether it's authority.

In this particular case, confessing the sins of the nation, they are to be placed symbolically on the head of the goat, and he shall send the goat away into the desert, and the goat will carry on it all their sins. The Lord has laid on him or transferred to him if you will. I think it's the picture of the scapegoat.

The Lord has laid on him, God's suffering servant, the iniquity of us all. This is counterintuitive to how most people think. I mean, we are brought up with rugged individualism.

You mess up and lie in your own bed. Don't ask George, don't ask anybody else to do it for you. You're responsible for yourself.

This rugged individualism. In Christianity, we are introduced to a concept of grace and love where somebody else steps up and redemption, which carries all those wonderful words, *padah* in the Hebrew Bible, to ransom, to release, to free, to liberate, to make right in a sense by that effort, whether some physical effort in behalf of another or paying something in order to release someone from what is holding them back. That's a marvelous picture.

And that's Christ's death, who, in effect, allows people through freeing them from their sins as He became sin for us, to use the words in the New Testament. Not that He became a sinner; He was a sin-bearer. And so, when it says He became sin for us, He became the sin-bearer for us.

So, this picture in Isaiah's day of anticipating the work of the suffering servant, the New Testament theology fleshes all of this out. As He is crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us shalom was upon Him. And the emphasis on shalom there, which means well-being and harmony.

Yes, it's often translated peace, but it really means health, welfare, friendship, flourishing, bringing everything together, completion. We are not complete, that's what shalom means. Perfect with being integrated and hence healthy and well.

Until we know the wellness that comes from Him, even the rabbis used shalom as one of the epithets, one of the names by which the Almighty is referred to. The great integrator, the great one that brings it all together in that harmonious, complete wellness package.

You're not well until God brings that wellness. More about that theme next week when I'll return to it in another passage in Isaiah. The third main section of the prophecy, the resignation to His sufferings, verses 7-9.

Yes, I think it's a parallel. There was some kind of rupture that happened when Jesus was on the cross between God Himself and His Son. Was it because He could not look upon sin in some way? But there was a disconnect there.

And I think certainly it draws from this Old Testament parallel. But that's only temporary. You know how Heschel, you're reading Heschel.

Heschel believes in God because the Hebrew Bible teaches that His love endures forever. It's hesed. That means loyal, constant, steadfast love, which endures forever.

Read the psalmist. It's a refrain. His love endures forever.

But there are times, Heschel would say, of suspended love. And when the wrath of God or the turning of the face happens, can't look on you anymore, when there's a breach between the Almighty in some way and His people, it's only short-lived. It's momentary or temporary suspended love.

God in and of Himself is love. But sometimes, He suspends that. His nature is characterized by hesed.

We can, as it were, momentarily or temporarily affect our fellowship and relationship with Him because of our sin. But nothing permanently disconnects that. His love endures forever.

The resignation to His sufferings, verses 7 through 9, speak to us about some of the things in relation to the final hours of His life. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He didn't open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter as a sheep before His shearers' silence, so He did not open His mouth.

Certainly, it applies in His own defense before either Caiaphas, Herod, or Pilate. The natural human tendency is to complain in the midst of adversity, and yet the emphasis is on silence. Matthew 27, for instance, 12 to 14, when He was accused by the chief priests and the elders, He gave no answer.

Then Pilate asked Him, Don't you hear the testimony they're bringing against You? But Jesus made no reply, not even a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor. There are a number of these places in the New Testament. Mark 14:60 and 61.

John 19:8 and 9. So, the Gospel writers pick up on this theme. Again, Isaiah 53:9 of the 12 verses is cited in one way or another in the New Testament. This is the most frequently quoted passage or chapter from the Hebrew Bible in the pages of the New Testament.

Also, in regard to the resignation to His sufferings, He willingly laid up and gave up His life. It says in verse 8, By oppression and judgment, He was taken away. Taken away here to the place of execution.

Who can speak of His descendants? Jesus would be precipitously cut off. He would die, of course, without a male heir. Which, according to the Hebrew Bible, was considered to be a tragedy.

Look at all the things you read, starting with the book of Genesis, to ensure a male heir. Abraham, who is childless, starts there. And then, in verse 9, it says, He was assigned a grave with the wicked.

Now, notice the parallelism here. A lot of people read this quickly and perhaps come to the conclusion that they assigned a grave with the wicked. Oh, that must have a reference to the two thieves in the cross.

And then it says, With the rich in His death. That must be Joseph of Arimathea. He was the rich guy.

And it was His cave that was used. The parallelism here, however, does not really square with that because the parallelism seems to be in verse 9, linking wicked and rich. So, I don't think the primary reference here is to fit Joseph of Arimathea into this text because rich is parallel to wicked, so it must imply that the rich, in some way, were linked with wickedness.

It's true in the ancient Near East, it was believed the rich got rich by using wicked schemes. And so, the implication was, and I could mention a number of world leaders of recent years, who have been demised or brought low, and people have checked out their bank accounts, and as dictators or tyrants, they have milked the poor people of their nations to personally enrich themselves. So, rich and wicked, appropriately, in that context, again, go together.

That's why you bring the rich down. The rich were wicked also because they treated their riches as something they should trust in rather than God. And if the Bible has a problem with riches, it's because, take Matthew, who was a converted tax collector. He talks more about money than any other gospel writer.

He has his own perspective on that. Once Levi came to faith, and the rich were often wicked because you cannot serve God and mammon, or God and riches, as it's simply put in scriptures. Money must serve you.

You must not serve it. And lust for possessions, which often has characterized some who are rich rather than trusting God. So, the servant's burial is not one of honor.

The last part of verse 9 qualifies things. It says, he has done no violence. There was no deceit in his mouth.

But he was treated as a common criminal. Verse 10 is clear. I was on a panel with some rabbis a few years ago when Mel Gibson's film came out.

The question is, who put Jesus to death? There was a lot of discussion. What role did Jews have? What role did Romans have? And the rabbi says, stop the music. Let's get biblical about this.

It's academic in one sense. Who drove the nails? He said, I think it was the Roman soldiers. Were Jews involved? Yes, in some ways.

But at the end of the day, it was the will of God that this happened. And we never forget, according to both the New Testament, which Christians read, but the suffering servant hints at this, that it was God's will to crush him. This is the same word used in Psalm 1. It means desire, plan, pleasure, business.

It's used in Psalm 1, too. The righteous man, his haphez, his delight, bent, pleasure, will, is in the will of God, or the Torah of God. And in that he meditates day and night.

A suffering servant and one treated like hundreds, yes, even thousands, some Jewish scholars of the 1st century would say, there were many Jews who were suffering in the 1st century under the hands of Rome. Christians see in the suffering of Jesus the Jew a very important figure for the church. But for Jews, they see him more one out of many who were suffering.

So, yes, it's part of a large number of Jews who, at that particular time, were suffering under Rome. Let's not forget who built the ramp that leads up to Metzudah, Masada. Jewish slaves led to the fall of Masada in the spring of 73.

Thousands of Jews became slaves when Jerusalem fell under Titus in 70. So, there were many Jews who were affected by Rome. Killed, starved, made slaves, etc.

Christianity focuses on one of these Jews because he's unique. He's God Himself. And so, Jews, in general, don't see the particularity of this one.

They see him as part of the masses of Jews who were ill-treated in the 1st century. A couple of other things about him. And so, it was God's will to crush him.

Complex and as difficult as that may be. And there's a paradox here, and some of the best stuff Heschel gives you concerns paradox. The paradox is the people who put Jesus on the cross were murderers.

And from a human point of view, they should be tried as murderers. They unjustly put a person to death. But looking at it from God's eternal perspective, we do not always see through human tragedy, even we who are not the Son of God Himself. Even things that happen in our lives, we do not always see how these things as Genesis 50, verse 20 puts it, Joseph in relation to his brothers, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

Sort of the Hebrew Bible, Romans 8.28. Through sinful actions, God sometimes in His ultimate plan, through that pain is working something out which is unknown at the time. We tend to focus on the pain not on the plan. And as I've said many times, one of the strong messages of the Hebrew Bible is that everything is theological.

We want to make some things theological. There is a holism, H-O-L-I-S-M, there is a holism that the God of Israel has His fingers in the entire pie of life. And sometimes outwardly and dramatically, His hand can be seen.

Other times it is the hidden hand of Providence whereby He's still working. Sometimes not overtly, but covertly, behind the scenes. Still controlling history.

Working all things for His own purposes. Having said that, I think our role, how God works history out is His responsibility. Our role is to oppose evil.

Our role is to come alongside others who are suffering and be ministers of encouragement. That's our role. Our role is not the role of the prophet.

The role of the prophet was not simply to report events, but theologically interpret events. That interpretation will emerge in due time. It's very crass when Christians have theological interpretations in the midst of the tragedies of life.

We have to believe God is there in the midst of that. But what God is doing is not always, on the surface, clear at the time. There is, then, the life of the servant who gives his life as a guilt offering.

Verse 10. This word, *asham*, A-S-H-A-M, is the word for guilt offering. That's why you learn the names of the five basic offerings in Bible 101.

The Holberg Offering, the Trespass Offering, or the Guilt Offering. This was, of course, for known sins and also required restitution to justice, to right the wrong, practically, with the offended party. So, this is the picture of the suffering servant.

His life is like a guilt offering. When we talk of Jesus' work as God's sacrifice for man's sin, here's one of your main words used out of the Levitical world of sacrifices that is used for the suffering servant himself, as it were, a guilt offering. Now, there's a change in the last few verses when we look at the rewards of his suffering.

Through his death, which is viewed as a trespass offering, he will eventually see his offspring. Now I think we're looking down as this has particular reference to God's suffering servant, the Son of God suffering for the sins of the world. In the New Testament, as our inspired commentators took this text and applied it to the life of Jesus.

So, how, then, is this eventually to be understood? Seeing offspring. Well, we're part of that offspring. He is Mashiach, and we take our name from Mashiach.

It just comes to us in Greek translation, Christian. Children. So, we relate to this One who became the suffering servant.

We are part of His offspring. We are children of faith. That's how we become associated with the Anointed One.

We have known the Spirit of God. We have received that anointing, if you will, from 1 John. And everyone who has that anointing, not with a capital A, but we have received the Spirit and that anointing.

We are born spiritually. And in that sense, we are His progeny. We are His spiritual offspring that come through the suffering servant.

Then it says, He will prolong His days. And the NIV says He will see the light of life. Now, there are about a dozen and a half places in Isaiah's prophecy where Dead Sea Scroll readings are important.

And if you like reading the footnotes in your Bible, which I urge you to do, and I'll come back to this theme next week on how readings from the Dead Sea Scroll affect how we read certain passages in Isaiah. But in verse 11, this expression, He will see the light of life. That's how the Dead Sea Scrolls read that line in 11B.

The light of life is there, obviously, in reference to the resurrection. The light symbolizes well-being, salvation, or life, as it does in Psalm 27, verse 1. So here I think after His suffering and death, it is anticipating life out of death. One of these places where the emphasis now is increasingly going to be positive of what comes out of the servant's death.

This little word in verse 11, to make many to be accounted righteous, or the NIV saying the servant will justify or make righteous many, quite likely anticipates that if

Paul were here, he would say, Oh, I'll tell you what that's about. And he says in Romans 5:18 and 19, Then as one man's trespass led to the condemnation of all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to the acquittal and life for all men. By one man's obedience, many were made righteous by Christ's work on the cross.

Christ's righteousness is forensically, if you will, it's a bookkeeping term in Greek. It's reckoned to the ledger instantaneously when we believe we are justified by faith. It's a declarative act of God where because of His righteous servant, He looks at us just as if we had not sinned.

We are righteous positionally, but we are going to sin today, so pragmatically, we are not fully righteous.

But the declaration, because that's what justification by faith is all about, is a declaratory act of God whereby He deems the sinner righteous because of the work of someone else. So, He will justify many. Justification comes through death on the cross.

That was the result. The last imagery here, and I'm done, is dividing the spoils of a great victory. I will give Him a portion among the great.

He will divide the spoils with the strong. This is Christus Victor. The strong are Christ's followers who, if you will, battle the opposition, Satan, the opponent, spiritually speaking.

The spoil, God will reward His servant for his suffering just as a king might come and divide the spoils or booty of a great win in battle and divide with the warriors. There's a spiritual battle going on here. And the language is figurative.

And it's the language of war. His people go to battle with Him. This is divine hero Christology.

And here He triumphs after suffering. And now He is the champion. And those who go out to battle with Him as His warriors share in the enjoyment of the spoils of that victory.

A victory which He brings to pass through His, not just His death, but His resurrection from the dead. And in other texts, the promise of His return. So, through the resurrection then, He becomes victorious.

And that is the ultimate work of the suffering servant. Bringing many into redemption through His work. Alright, next time, I'm going to talk about a number of selected passages in Isaiah.

And we'll do that on Monday and Wednesday for the final couple of classes.

This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 33, Isaiah 53.