

Dr. Robert Chisholm, Servant Songs, Session 4, Video Overview Podcast

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's dive into one of the most fascinating and, honestly, most debated passages ever written, Isaiah chapter 53. It describes this figure, the Suffering Servant. But who is he? Well, drawing on the incredible analysis of Dr. Robert Chisholm, we're going to play detective and try to solve this ancient mystery.

You know, at its core, this whole thing reads like a prophetic whodunit. You've got an innocent victim, a shocking death, and a motive that could change everything. The big question, the one people have been asking for thousands of years, is who on earth is this passage talking about? So, to get to the bottom of this, we have to start with the evidence.

Let's treat the text itself like a crime scene. Our first question is pretty simple. What exactly happened to the servant? Now, the original Hebrew here is a little tricky, but as Dr. Chisholm points out, the meaning is crystal clear.

The servant was railroaded. He was put through some kind of coercive legal process. So, he's officially condemned, but the text tells us right from the jump that the whole thing was raked.

And this bogus verdict leads to a final, terrible sentence. He was cut off from the land of the living. So, what does that mean? Was he thrown in jail? Exiled? Well, the text is actually very, very specific here.

Yeah, this isn't poetic or ambiguous language. In the Old Testament, when you see this phrase, it means one thing and one thing only. Death.

The servant's suffering ends with his own execution. You might think, case closed, but this is where the mystery really starts to get interesting. And here we hit the first huge twist in the story.

So, he's executed like a common criminal, right? His body should have been tossed in some unmarked grave, but that's not what happens. Instead, he gets an honorable burial in a rich man's tomb. It's this powerful little clue baked right into the text, hinting that despite the official verdict, this guy was innocent.

Okay, so we've established what happened to the servant. Now for the really big question: the motive. Why would an innocent man go through all of this? The text gives an answer that is, well, it's radical.

This right here is the heart of the whole passage. His death wasn't just some tragic accident. It was for a reason.

He chose to take the punishment that other people deserved. It's this incredibly powerful idea we now call substitutionary atonement. One person taking the hit for someone else.

This is what Dr. Chisholm calls the gospel, hiding right inside this ancient text. I mean, think about it. It's a total reversal of how justice normally works.

The guilty get to be declared not guilty because an innocent person already paid their fine. It's an idea so profound, it literally becomes a cornerstone of Christian theology. Okay, so we have the crime.

We have the motive. Now for the final act, identifying our servant. Who in the world could actually fit this incredible description? Dr. Chisholm lays this out like a brilliant chess match.

He calls it a three-move checkmate to figure out who the servant is. It's a simple process of elimination, really. You just rule out who it can't be until only one person is left standing.

Let's walk through it. So let's follow the logic. First, could the servant be the whole nation of Israel? Nope, doesn't work because his whole job is to save sinful Israel.

You can't be the rescuer and the person who needs rescuing at the same time. Okay, so scratch Israel. Second, could it be the prophet Isaiah himself? Well, no, because the prophet clearly says, "All we like sheep have gone astray," putting himself in the same boat as everyone else who needs to be saved.

So with those two off the table, there's really only one candidate left, the promised Messiah, that anointed deliverer king from prophecy. But okay, this answer that the servant is the Messiah just creates a whole new puzzle because this picture of a suffering, dying servant clashes and clashes hard with what most people expected the Messiah to be, a victorious, conquering king. How can both of those be true? And this is the real tension, isn't it? On one hand, you have this popular expectation of a Messiah who's basically a warrior king, someone who's going to crush Israel's enemies.

But then Isaiah 53 gives us a servant, someone who's rejected, beaten, and killed. These two pictures just seem like they can't possibly be of the same person. But here it is, the final twist of the story.

The suffering is not the end. The text says that the servant's suffering is the exact thing that leads to his ultimate victory and glory. Look at what happens after he dies.

He's vindicated by God. He's exalted and lifted up high. He gets to divide the spoils of victory, just like a conquering hero.

His suffering wasn't a defeat at all. It was the very strategy he used to accomplish God's plan. So the paradox gets solved.

The suffering is the path to the glory. And so this ancient text leaves us with this incredible mind-bending idea. The solution it offers is that the only way to the throne was through the grave.

It gives us a picture of a savior who had to be both a suffering servant and a conquering king, totally rewriting the rules. And it just leaves us with that final, powerful question to think about.