

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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The Suffering Servant

Isaiah, who prophesied centuries before God the Son came to earth, gave numerous details of the coming Messiah that have been perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. Among Isaiah's messianic prophecies is the 53rd chapter and preceding verses, in which the Messiah is described as the LORD's servant who would suffer for our sins.

The passage begins with the words "*Behold, my servant will deal wisely*" (**Isa. 52:13a**).

It is striking to see Deity referred to as "*my servant*." Yet, there has never been a greater example of servitude than the Son of God.

This is a key theme of **Isaiah 53**. Though the Son has existed from eternity and took part in creation (**John 1:1-3**), He "*emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, yes, the death of the cross*" (**Phil. 2:7-8**).

Isaiah 52:13 goes on to say, "*He will be exalted and lifted up, and will be very high.*" In **Philippians 2**, this exaltation is connected to Christ's servitude. Christ showed the greatest example of humility (**Phil. 2:3-8**). "*Therefore God also highly exalted Him, and gave to Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father*" (**verses 9-11**). This is the supreme example of God exalting those who humble themselves.

Christ's exaltation was shown by His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of

the Father (**1 Pet. 3:22**). Prior to this, though, came His *descent* to earth (**Eph. 4:9**). It is remarkable to consider that the Son of God walked the earth as a man, and even more remarkable to consider that He lived as a *lowly* man from the world's perspective.

Isaiah 52:14 returns to this thought, saying "*Just as many were astonished at you – His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.*"

To hear that the Messiah would be exalted probably did not surprise too many of those anticipating Him. On the other hand, to hear of His suffering, was likely difficult to accept.

Perhaps because of how different the *real* Messiah was from the one expected by the Jews, Christ was largely rejected when He came to earth. This is the thought moving into **Isaiah 53:1**: *Who has believed our message? To whom has the LORD's arm been revealed?*

This verse is quoted in **John**, when the inspired apostle says, "*But though He had done so many signs before them, yet they didn't believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which He spoke, 'Lord, who has believed our report? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'*" (**John 12:37-38**).

Though Jesus suffered immensely to make salvation possible for people like you and me, the majority treated Him as an enemy while He was on earth, and the majority continue to treat Him as an enemy by rejecting His message (cf. **Rom. 10:16**).

His rejection is perhaps not as surprising when we consider how "unimpressive" His life was from man's perspective. This is the idea in the second part of **Isaiah 53:2**: *He has no good looks or majesty. When we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.*

Jesus' greatness was very different from what the world typically looks for. There is no indication He had remarkable looks, wealth, (worldly) education, etc. Moreover, by accepting the immense sufferings that were part of the Father's will for Him, Jesus accepted being esteemed a "failure" by many.

The sufferings He faced are further described in **verse 3**, which says "*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering and acquainted with grief. He was despised as one from whom men hide their face; and we didn't respect Him.*"

Jesus fully experienced what it means to suffer gross mistreatment and hatred from others (**John 7:1, 7; 15:25**).

Astonishingly, this mistreatment He faced was assumed to be a result of His own wrongdoing. **Isaiah 53:4** says, "*Surely He has borne our sickness and carried our suffering; yet we considered Him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted.*" Those who delivered Him up to be crucified claimed it was for blasphemy (**Matt. 26:65-66**), though Christ was in no way guilty of this.

The *real* wrongdoing that necessitated His going to the cross is brought out in **Isaiah 53:5**: "*But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on Him; and by His wounds we are healed.* In truth, it was not Christ's sin that prompted His crucifixion, but the sin of people like you and me.

This thought is continued in **verse 6**, which says "*All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*"

Notice the word "*all*" at both the beginning and end of this verse. No matter how good we are from the world's perspective, each of us who has reached a point of accountability before God *needs* the forgiveness Jesus' death makes possible.

At the same time, no matter how bad we have been from the world's perspective, each of us *can* receive this forgiveness. It is God's desire for all to come to Him and receive the gift of salvation (**1 Tim. 2:4**).

Jesus was aware of the suffering He would have to face in order to offer us this gift. He had the power to avoid such hardships. Yet, He *willingly* and *meekly* endured them.

This is a key point of **Isaiah 53:7**: "*He was oppressed, yet when He was afflicted He didn't open His mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He didn't open His mouth.*"

Jesus was *misjudged* (**Isa. 53:8a**), and characterized as a common criminal, though He never sinned (**verse 9**; cf. **Matt. 27:38**).

Jesus' sufferings exemplified the extent of His perfect obedience. "*It pleased the LORD to bruise Him*" (**Isa. 53:10a**), and Jesus perfectly obeyed. The reasons the Father desired the Son to suffer show that Christ's crucifixion accomplished the most good that has ever been done for mankind, allowing atonement for sin and adoption into His family (**verse 10**).

This "Suffering Servant" passage ends by noting one of the most amazing points of Jesus' crucifixion. The end of **verse 12** says Jesus "*made intercession for the transgressors.*" Jesus desired forgiveness for the very people who delivered Him up to die. As He was being crucified, He said, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (**Luke 23:34**).

He likewise desires forgiveness for each of us. Instead of harboring resentment against us for sinning and causing Him to have to go the cross, Jesus desperately wants each of us to accept the gift He gave His life for.

May each of us choose to do so by coming to Christ on His terms (cf. **Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4**) and abiding in Him, and may we appreciate all that the Suffering Servant has endured for us.

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