

Sermon Outline

THE YEAR OF OUR LORD, 2013-2014

THE SAVING POWER OF THE LORD

ISAIAH 53:1-3

I. Introduction

II. Songs of the Servant of the Lord

- A. Isaiah 53:1-3 occurs in a series of passages that have come to be known as the Servant Songs of Isaiah.
- B. Altogether, there are four Servant songs in the book of Isaiah:
 - 1. 42:1-7
 - 2. 49:1-6
 - 3. 50:4-9
 - 4. 52:13-53:12
- C. These are called the Servant songs is because the central character featured in these portions of Scripture is this mysterious figure whom the Lord calls his Servant.
- D. In Isaiah 42:1, for instance, which is the first song, the Lord announces the work of his Servant in the following way:
 - Behold my servant, whom I uphold,*
 - my chosen, in whom my soul delights;*
 - I have put my Spirit upon him;*
 - he will bring forth justice to the nations.*
 - 1. And as you can tell right away from those words, the work of the Servant of the Lord isn't going to be restricted to Israel.
 - 2. But it would affect the nations of the world.
- E. Who is this Servant of the Lord and what exactly would he do?
 - 1. The songs present us with several answers, which we can understand as being several dimensions of his work.
 - 2. According to 42:4, the Servant of the Lord will...
 - a. Establish justice in the earth
 - b. Bring the Law of God to the coastlands.
 - 3. According to 42:6-7, the Servant of the Lord will...
 - a. Bring true enlightenment to the world.

b. Bring freedom to the prisoners in darkness.

4. According to 49:5, the Servant of the Lord will be the Agent by whom God will re-gather his scattered people and form them once again as his one, united people.

F. While Isaiah says more about what the Servant of the Lord, those points give us a broad and general idea of what the Servant of the Lord will do.

1. He is going to be a *Teacher* to the nations of the world.

2. He is also going to be a *Liberator* of the oppressed of the world.

3. He is also going to be the *Gatherer* and *Restorer* of God's holy nation.

—In summary, the Servant of the Lord is the Agent by whom God brings salvation to his people and to the rest of the world.

G. But to understand Isaiah 53:1-2, we must also consider what had been said in the previous verses, specifically, 52:9-15. In those verses, the Lord, through Isaiah, presents us with another explanation of what his Servant would do.

1. The Lord says in verse 9:

*The LORD has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.*

a. This shows that the Servant of the Lord is closely associated with the coming salvation of God.

b. It speaks of God's salvation in terms of the baring of God's arm, almost like a flexing of God's muscles. God is pictured here as a great, powerful warrior who flexes his arms and shows his power to the world.

2. In verses 11-12, the Lord urges his people to depart from the lands that have held them captive. Yet, they will not do so in anxious haste because the Lord himself will go ahead of them and behind them.

3. In 52:13, that the Lord refers to his Servant once again.

a. The Arm of the Lord and the Servant of the Lord are closely associated—and possibly identified as the same person.

*¹³ Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted.*

*¹⁴ As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—*

¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations;

*kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand.*

- b. The language here is very mysterious, to say the least.
 - i. What does the Lord mean when he says that the Servant would be “high and lifted up”?
 - ii. What does he mean when he says that the Servant’s appearance would be disfigured?
 - iii. What could he mean when says that the Servant will “sprinkle many nations”?
- c. The following picture of the Servant emerges:
 - i. The Servant of the Lord is going to be a highly exalted figure.
 - ii. The Servant of the Lord is going to be a broken person.
 - iii. The Servant of the Lord is going to be a priestly figure who cleanses the nations—and Isaiah 53 will show how he does this.

H. Basically, the Servant of the Lord will consecrate the nations and bring salvation to the world precisely by absorbing into himself all the curses and punishments that their sins deserve.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What are the Servant songs? Where are they in Isaiah? And why are they called such? (2) What works would the Servant of the Lord do? (3)

III. Introducing the Arm of the Lord (Isaiah 53:1)

- A. Chapter 53 begins with a question: “Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”
- B. When Isaiah poses this question, he may be asking, Who will be privileged enough to see for himself the great saving power of God? Who would have the honor of seeing for themselves the great agent of God’s salvation?

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What question does chapter 53 start with? (2) Who is the Arm of the Lord? How is he related to the Servant of the Lord?

IV. The Arm of the Lord Is Likened to a Young Plant and Root (Isaiah 53:2)

- A. The prophet proceeds to talk about this great Arm of the Lord; this great Saving Power of the Lord.
- B. Seemingly in contrast to the language of power that he used earlier, Isaiah now talks about the Lord’s great agent of salvation in humble terms.

1. Speaking of the Arm of the Lord, Isaiah says, “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground...”
2. The Lord’s Servant has small beginnings.
 - a. He is likened to “a young plant” and “a root out of dry ground.”
 - b. If you have ever seen a young plant or a root out of dry ground, the image is not very impressive.
 - c. Young plants and roots out of dry ground look very fragile, very delicate.
 - d. Unlike massive trees with sprawling roots, young plants don’t typically capture the attention of the world. They are often ignored and easily walked over.
 - e. Yet, this is the surprising form that God’s saving power will take. When God flexes his mighty arms to accomplish his greatest act of deliverance, the event would start out quietly and humbly.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) By likening the Servant of the Lord to a young plant, what is the Lord seeking to communicate about his Agent of salvation? (2) How does this contrast with the world’s vision of its heroes?

V. The Arm of the Lord Has No Beauty or Majesty (Isaiah 53:2)

- A. Unlike so many of the heroes of the world, the Arm of the Lord would also be without beauty or majesty “that we should desire him.”
- B. In many traditional cultures of the world, heroes are not only powerful people; they are also beautiful.
 1. In Greek culture for instance, all their gods and goddesses are beautiful beings, glorious and gorgeous to behold.
- C. But Isaiah says that when the Arm of the Lord is revealed, he would have no form, no majesty, no beauty—and the very important words, “that we should desire him.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) By saying that the Servant of the Lord has no beauty or majesty, what is the Lord seeking to communicate about his Agent of salvation? (2) How does this contrast with the world’s vision of its saviors?

VI. The Arm of the Lord Is a Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3)

- A. Not only is the Saving Power of the Lord delicate, frail, and without beauty, he would also be associated with the sad, the depressed, the broken—in short, the losers of society. Verse 3:

*He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;*

*and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

- B. But there is one more feature to consider. Not only is the Saving Power of the Lord delicate, frail, and without beauty, as it turns out, he would also be associated with the sad, the depressed, the broken of the world (v 3).
- C. We have to understand about this passage is that it offers us a very compressed vision of the Servant of the Lord.
1. It is clear from the ministry of our Lord Jesus that men did not always hide their faces from him. In fact, he was rather popular at the start of his ministry (Jn 12:19).
 2. Only when it became clear that he was going to the cross that people began to turn from him.
 3. But as far as his core identity is concerned, the Servant of the Lord will be rejected by men. Instead of seeing him as the great Power of God, the world will see him as the great Loser.
 4. Thus, sadness will be at the heart of his identity in this world. As long as he is in this world fulfilling the work that God had sent him to do, the Servant of the Lord will be “a man of sorrows.”
- D. Yet, there is a reason why the Servant suffers so much.
1. It is because he has taken upon himself our suffering and our punishment.
 2. The sadness and ugliness that we see in the Lord’s Servant does not originate in him, but in us.
 3. This is what it takes for God to save Israel and the world: If there is to be any kind of future for us, then all the sin and evil that we have done needs to be removed from us—and heaped upon the Servant of the Lord, who will bear them all for us.
- E. Thus, the Servant’s seeming weakness is not ultimately weakness at all. His weakness is our salvation. His sadness is our joy. His death is our life.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) By saying that the Servant of the Lord is a “man of sorrows,” what is the Lord seeking to communicate about his Agent of salvation? (2) How are we to understand the sufferings of the Servant? From where do his sufferings originate? (3) How does this contrast with the world’s vision of its saviors?

VII. Cast Your Hope on the Suffering Servant

The saving power of the Lord has appeared in Jesus Christ. As the Servant of the Lord, Jesus fulfils the prophecy by becoming the vessel, the carrier, of the sin, evil, judgment, and sadness that afflicts the world. That explains why he is disfigured. That explains why he is sorrowful. Yet, it is here that

we also see the power of the Lord's Servant: It is because he is the strong Arm of the Lord that he can effectively remove all sin and judgment from God's people once and for all. So in the end, this is how God saves the world—by taking his own punishments upon himself in the cursed death of the cross. This is our mighty Savior. Let us cast ourselves upon him. Let us depend on him for the salvation of our souls, and for the dawning of the Kingdom of God upon our hearts.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How is our Lord Jesus the suffering Servant and the strong Power of the Lord at the same time? (2) How does God want us to respond to the appearance of his suffering Servant?