

Unit 15

God Shows Mercy to His People

2 Chronicles; Prophets

Memory Verse

“They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

—EZEKIEL 37:23

God Promises a Suffering Servant

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus is the Suffering Servant who was rejected and struck down on our behalf in order to win the victory.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Isaiah 49–55

Walk around the NICU at a local hospital and listen to the babies crying, unable to vocalize their hurts and their questions. Pokes, prods, tubes, and shots. These are painful and surely confusing for an infant. The weight of a child’s pain is felt profoundly by a parent, and its purpose may even elude us.

Now move to the Labor and Delivery Unit, where you hear a different sort of cry—laborious cries. What sounds like someone near an excruciating death are the pangs of childbirth. Moms endure the pain because they know what is coming—a beautiful, unique, wonderfully made baby. And moms are even willing to face this pain again for the sake of another child.

Our perception of pain often depends on what we hope for after the pain.

How do you tend to perceive your pain and suffering in this world?



Pointless

Irritating

Redeemable

Purposeful


Group Time

Point 1: The Suffering Servant is despised and rejected (Isa. 52:13–53:3).


^{52:13} 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.

^{53:1} Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 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.

For the overwhelming solemn, even negative, tone of this passage, one can almost miss the fact that it begins in victory. Honor would come to the Servant, yet this Man would suffer deeply. But His punishment would not be for His own sins but for those who would behold Him in faith. It's this pivotal act that would cause knees to bow. The Servant's **suffering** leads to **victory**. His broken body paves the path to glorification.

 Why do people so often believe that suffering cannot be connected with glory?

We typically correlate leadership with charisma, power, and victory. With God's perspective, however, we must correlate leadership with servanthood and glory with the lowly. In this passage we see **three ways** God weaves together these polarizing concepts through the revelation of the “arm of the LORD,” the Servant Jesus Christ: *First, He comes onto the scene in an unassuming way. Second, this “arm” has no extraordinary beauty to draw people to Him. Finally, the Lord’s “arm” would be rejected because He would be marked by suffering.*

 How should this prophecy about the Suffering Servant challenge our views about victory and success?

Point 2: The Suffering Servant is struck down as a substitute (Isa. 53:4-9).

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Despite what many people would think when this prophecy was fulfilled—that the Servant deserved a punishment for His own doing—we see that an innocent Man would be killed due to “our” rebellion. The repetition of this first-person plural pronoun hammers home that the Servant would suffer in *our* place because in *our* sin, we have chosen to go *our* own way. His suffering would not be just any suffering either. We see four types of attacks against the Servant in verse 7: 1) He was **oppressed**; 2) He was **afflicted**; 3) He was **a lamb led to slaughter**; and 4) He was **sheared**.



What are some reasons people object to the need for a substitute to pay the penalty for their sin?

The Servant, Jesus, knew that His purpose was to be the perfect sacrifice, thus fulfilling a temporary sacrificial system the Israelites had practiced for centuries. All throughout the Old Testament we read about animal sacrifices given to bear the sins of the human offender. What repetitious and laborious work! There had to be a different way, and there was—the life and death of Jesus Christ. “With his wounds we are healed” (v. 5).

Christ as Substitute: Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself _____ nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal _____, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the redemption of humanity from sin.

Point 3: The Suffering Servant is exalted and victorious (Isa. 53:10-12).

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

How are we to take the comment that the Lord was pleased to crush His Servant severely, or as we further understand the situation, that it was the Father's will to crush His Son? The Father had a purpose for the pain, which the Son submitted to and agreed with: Through Jesus' wounds would come the redemption of people, along with our every tear, every battle, and every heartache. Jesus willingly submitted to death because He also knew the plan and what His future would hold: reward for His obedience.

How do you tend to perceive your pain and suffering in this world?



Pointless

Irritating

Redeemable

Purposeful

Just as the Servant, Jesus, came in the most unassuming way, so does a satisfied life. Our culture will lure us in with tactics of living for oneself and the glory that comes with it. But God's economy is different and true. It is in serving by faith that we will be the most fulfilled. It is in laying down our lives that we will find satisfaction. Ultimately, it is in our participation in the redemption of souls that we will find eternal joy.



What temptations of the world distract us from following the pattern of the Suffering Servant?



Voices from Church History

"The sorest afflictions ... when we see them in the hand of GOD, Who dispenses them; when we know that it is our loving FATHER, Who abases and distresses us, our sufferings lose all their bitterness, and our mourning becomes all joy."¹

—Brother Lawrence
(c. 1614-1691)

My Mission

Because we have received life through the sacrifice of Jesus, we embrace a life of service and suffering on His behalf as we share the gospel with others.

- **How will you respond in faith to the Servant who suffered to justify sinners?**
- **What are some ways your group can serve and intercede for the rebels in your community?**
- **How will you sacrifice so you can share the good news of the Suffering Servant with others?**

Voices from the Church

“The Lord’s solution to sin is for his servant to take human sin on himself and to offer himself as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of others. He will be sinless, but by offering himself as a sacrifice, he will be the one through whom all others can receive forgiveness and salvation. Victory will come through suffering.”²

—Paulson Pulikottil

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Isaiah 49:1-26

To feel forgotten is a desolate feeling, even if you have a promise of a future hope. Isaiah 49 walks the exiled people of God through how they will be saved—through a Servant. Then it points them to what is to come—the redemption of Zion. Although the Lord describes their victorious future, the exiles still cry out, “Forsaken!” (v. 14).

Waiting is an issue that all of humanity wrestles with in general, but when Christians run ahead of God, we are saying that we think we know better than the Almighty. Forsaking the discipline of waiting can get us in trouble, but it also reveals our lack of trust in God’s promises.

In Luke, we are introduced to Anna and Simeon, two people in a long line of descendants who waited for Jesus, this highly anticipated Servant. Anna waited so eagerly that she never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying, prepared to meet the Messiah (Luke 2:36-37).

In the same way that Anna and Simeon looked to the future Messiah with eagerness, we are to look to the future for the day when all of heaven will come to earth, the day a great trumpet will sound and announce a land completely restored to its original order. The promise is clear: Heaven will come to earth; Jesus will reign in victory. Until then, we wait in holy anticipation.



When do you find yourself struggling to wait in faithfulness and with patience for heaven to come to earth?

Day 2: Read Isaiah 50:1–51:23

The Servant was nothing but obedient. He had spoken what He was asked to speak (50:4-5), and because of His words, He was beaten (50:6). With Jesus, the Servant, as our example, we also will face persecution for our obedience. Many churches proclaim “getting wealthy” and “remaining comfortable” in the name of Jesus. But Jesus, in His own words, declared that His followers would suffer in this world (John 16:33).

Right after the fall of humanity, evil Cain killed his righteous brother, Abel (Gen. 4; 1 John 3:12). Later, Joseph was imprisoned for refusing to commit adultery with his master’s wife (Gen. 39:6-20). In another example, the Israelites wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb for their bold faithfulness, but God intervened (Num. 14:5-10).

Jesus instructed His followers: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Matt. 5:11). Suffering and persecution are part of our story, but the weight of glory outweighs our earthly woes. Jesus asked for His cup of suffering on the cross to pass Him by (Matt. 26:36-46), but He still endured it because He fully understood what lay before Him: His obedience would result in joy and exaltation (Heb. 12:2).



How can you keep a heavenly viewpoint in the midst of suffering?

Day 3: Read Isaiah 52:1–53:3

In this passage, Jerusalem is asked to dress up and take a seat in honor (52:1-2), opposite of Babylon who was told to go sit in the dust in rags (47:1). Similarly, God has a glorious position prepared for those who are in Christ, but people must know they are lost before they can know they can be saved. We must first understand how enslaved we are to our own sins, from which we need to be freed (52:2).

When believers live as if they are captive to sin, what we are saying to a dying world is that God can’t save us from it. Like it or not, we have been called to carry a divine reputation. We will only be able to do this through the power of the Holy Spirit. What a privilege and honor it is to be the feet that bring good news, but we can only swiftly carry that news if we stop holding onto the chains of sin that have already been broken.



How is repentance of sin revealed in your life, both privately and publicly?

Day 4: Read Isaiah 53:4-12

The Servant was like a lamb led to the slaughter. Jesus begged the Father for the cup to pass Him by (Matt. 26:39), but He endured the cross and was cut off from the land of the living. Jesus' story is tragic, but it is primarily one of exaltation.

Perhaps the first hint of Jesus' exaltation came immediately after His crucifixion. Fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus was assigned a grave with the rich (Isa. 53:9). Joseph of Arimathea convinced Pilate to let Jesus be buried in his wealthy family's tomb (Matt. 27:57-60).

The road from humiliation to exaltation began at the cross, passed through the tomb, and burst forth in glory three days later at His resurrection. Since then, He has been seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, interceding on our behalf (Heb. 7:25). Jesus gave of Himself once and for all, and God immediately exalted Him so that many could be exalted through Him.



How does God's ability to turn humiliation into exaltation encourage you to live in faithfulness to God's calling and mission?

Day 5: Read Isaiah 54:1–55:13

The Lord does the humanly impossible. He redeems the widow and the childless. He builds her gates of sparkling jewels and gives her walls of precious stones. It's a real-life Cinderella story. What was needed to satisfy the righteous anger of God had been done, and there would be no more barriers to Him.

In fact, He has set a table before us and has extended us the invitation to come join Him at the feast. The readers of this message were faced with a choice: to stay where they were in unbelief or accept the invitation with no clarity for their next step.

Faith always involves letting go of security and control to do things God's way. Remember when Peter walked on water (Matt. 14:28-30)? He had to get out of the boat. God is calling us from hunger to feast, but in answering this call, we are to leave our worldly ways of comfort and launch out into the adventures God has designed for His people. His ways are higher—will you believe and obey?



What is a specific area where you believe God is calling you to step out in faith? Pray for God to help your unbelief, and then take your next step.

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- The Suffering Servant is despised and rejected (Isa. 52:13–53:3).
- The Suffering Servant is struck down as a substitute (Isa. 53:4-9).
- The Suffering Servant is exalted and victorious (Isa. 53:10-12).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



When has thinking about Jesus' suffering for the sake of our salvation helped you during a time of prolonged suffering?



What steps can your church or small group take this week to become more mindful of others' suffering?

Notes

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A Word from the Editor



Trevin Wax

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader.

Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of *The Gospel Project* is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God's people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God's extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.

EDITOR

UNIT 13

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