



Sermon – April 4, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Isaiah 53:1 - 12

Acts 8:35

Let's open our Bibles together. We're going to spend our time this morning in Isaiah chapter 53. Isaiah 53. And if you're a guest in the room or watching online, welcome home. We're coming to God's word to celebrate the good news of Easter. That He is risen. That the future has now come into the present. And if you recognize what's going on here, we are seeing this not just in baptism earlier, we're going to hear the gospel through the preaching of the word. But we're also going to taste the gospel after this message in the Lord's Supper. Through the taking of those elements. So you can even begin now to prepare your hearts.

We thought last week about how this coming Messiah at Easter was a future king. We saw that in Zechariah 9. And what we're going to notice this morning is that in Isaiah 53, the prophet presents the coming Messiah as a suffering servant who secures salvation. And there's a danger on an Easter Sunday like this to come with a familiarity about the story. Where it loses its force. But let's not miss what's happening here. Because Isaiah is writing hundreds of years before Jesus comes. And he speaks this word of truth over us this morning reminding us what is at the heart of our faith. And let's see what he says in Isaiah 53 beginning in verse 1.

¹Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ²For 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. ³He 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. ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come into this moment, we pray that your Spirit would work in our hearts. That You would shape us to be more like Jesus. That we'd be gripped by the gospel in a fresh way

this Easter and that we could live as people of victory because of the blood of Your Son. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, what a difference a year makes. I mean this time last year at Easter, that was the last Sunday before I started preaching here at Central. And it was a totally different set of circumstances, wasn't it? You know, rather than being out on the hunt for Easter eggs and an Easter egg hunt, we were instead out hunting for toilet paper. And instead of going to your granny's house after church for Easter brunch, we were eating lukewarm leftovers from restaurants that were still adapting to how to be take-away places. And then instead of showing up to your Easter service in matching pastel colors to get that perfect picture for social media, we were at home watching the livestream in our pajamas. What a difference a year makes. And that's true not just here at Central but around the world. I remember a few years ago, I travelled to Israel and got to tour the holy land; an amazing experience. And one of the reasons I'm so excited that Tim and Jamie Skaggs are taking a group from Central this October back to the holy land. But one of those experiences that we had was to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The place where tradition tells us that Jesus was buried. And to see where that tomb would have been. And one of the ways that Easter was upended last year is that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, for the first time since the 1300's was locked. It was closed. The last time that had occurred was when the Black Plague happened in the 1300's. And the decision was made by a family who has carried the keys for that church for generation after generation. But what we find Isaiah speaking of here today is that the keys of the kingdom are not carried by a Middle Eastern family, but by a suffering servant. And that no matter what has happened over this last year and our experience through this pandemic, nothing can stop the gospel. Nothing can overcome the work of Christ in the resurrection. And that's what we're going to find that shows up here right in this text. The incredible work of Christ through His death and resurrection. And think about what's happening here in this text. Isaiah is writing before the exile of Israel out of the promised land. And towards the end of this book, he gives us these four servant songs, these four pictures of a coming Messiah. And he speaks of Him in ways that shape the entire Scripture. If you were to look at the New Testament you would find 7 examples of this passage being quoted in the New Testament. Over 30 additional allusions to this reality. In fact, John tells us in John 12:41 about how this text anticipates Jesus. He says, Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of Him. What Isaiah's going to lay out for us this morning is what it looks like to be Easter people in a Good Friday world. And the way he's going to show us that reality is by taking us through the Easter story of showing us how it is the story of the suffering servant that secures salvation. And I want you to notice as we start, back in these first four verses, that Easter reveals the depth of our sin. You see, the story of Easter doesn't start in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus is preparing for the bitter cup of God's judgment. Instead, the story of Easter starts in the Garden of Eden. Where Adam and Eve are preparing to take of the forbidden fruit. And from that moment, sin enters the world. It ruptures everything. And what we find Isaiah showing us is that the need for Easter comes from the depth of our sin. And he shows us in verse 1 that the depth of our sin is rooted in our lack of faith. Look at the question he asks there. Who has believed what he has heard from us? You see our primary problem with sin is not the mistakes we've made. It's not the wrongs we have done. It's not an issue of a lack of obedience, but a lack of faith. He is pointing to this reality when he speaks about how we need to believe. But that lack of belief goes deeper into our lives. He shows us next about how our sin hardens our hearts. And you'll see that there in verses 2 and 3. How is it that it hardens our hearts? Well, it tells us that even though this servant comes in verse 2, look at how it is that we

respond. In verse 3 it tells us that He was despised and rejected by men. In other words, the rebellion of our hard hearts caused us to resist the goodness of God's gospel rather than to embrace it. And don't we see these hard hearts on display in the story of the cross? I mean, remember the way that the gospels talk about it, like in Luke 23:11. The writer says:

¹¹And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate.

You see, the hard hearts of the crowd around him didn't recognize what was happening in that moment. When they saw the outstretched arms of Jesus, they didn't see the arm of the Lord. When they watched that forgettable crucifixion, they didn't recognize the unforgettable sacrifice that was taking place there. There are all of these things that we don't understand because of our hardness of heart. One of the things I've loved about being back in Texas is the chance to feel like I'm back at home. But one of the things that I'm still adjusting to is the changing of the seasons. So we had that mild winter and then it turns into this season that we're in right now. And you might be thinking it's Spring, but you're not right. You might be thinking it's March Madness season, but it's not right. This season in the Brazos Valley should only be known as Pollen Season. Every morning when you wake up and you go out to your car, you come out to it after work or school, you look at it and it's in that fresh caked layer of yellow. And there's nothing you can do. You can see it, but you can't solve it. On your own you can try to wash it away. You can try to do everything you can to cleanse it. But it just keeps coming back. It's more relentless than you are. And Isaiah's reminding us of the same reality that is true for us spiritually. That there is nothing that we can do to wash away our sins. That our efforts will never be enough. That the hardness of our heart is captured in the reality that we do not seek for God. Even if we see Jesus, even if we've grown up in church, even if we know the gospel story, it's not enough simply to see Jesus if we don't savor Jesus. There is a hardness of heart here and notice what he says as he goes on to verse 4. The hardness of heart shows up in broken lives. That's why he says there, surely he is born our griefs and carried our sorrows. If there's any Easter Sunday where those words should land on us, it should be one in the aftermath of a pandemic. Where I imagine if we went around this room or around your living room online, we could recount grief after grief, sorrow after sorrow, difficulty after difficulty. I assume there are probably those of you who have gone through financial devastation. Where because of a change in your work circumstances, you have suffered significantly on the financial front. Maybe it's for others of you, it's not financial devastation, but spiritual devastation. That in this season of isolation you have walked away from God. You've been captured again by addiction. You're here this morning just hoping you can have a reset. Maybe for others it's an emotional devastation. That right now on the couch in your living room as you watch online or in the seats, next to you right here there's an empty chair where somebody was this time last Easter. That's the broken lives that Isaiah speaks of. He speaks of the way that this suffering servant bore our griefs. He carried our sorrow. Isaiah has a word of comfort for us today. That the griefs that we cannot grip, the sorrows that we cannot shoulder, the sins that we cannot surmount, have been met by a Savior.

And that's what we're going to see unfold as we look on in this text beginning in verse 5. We're going to see a second reality here. The way that Easter reveals the source of our salvation. So notice how he says it here beginning in verse 5.

⁵But 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. ⁶All 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. ⁷He 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. ⁸By 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? ⁹And 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.

You notice here, Isaiah shows us that Easter doesn't just speak to the depths of our sin, but to the source of our salvation. So after unpacking the rejection of the servant in verses 1 through 4, he now begins to speak about the redemption through the servant in verses 5 through 9. How is it that this coming servant becomes our salvation? Well, what Isaiah shows us in this section is that he does that by meeting our two greatest spiritual needs. You'll notice in verse 5 and 6 that Easter meets our need for a substitute as Jesus takes our place. That first great spiritual need that we have is for someone to take our place. And why is that the case? Well, if you look throughout Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, the story of a substitute is all over the place. From the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve fall into sins and God sacrifices the first animal so that he might take their skins and cover over the shame of their sin. Or just a few chapters later in Genesis 22 when God instructs Abraham to take Isaac up to the mountaintop to sacrifice his one and only son. Instead, God provides an alternate, a ram in the thicket who becomes the substitute sacrifice. Or perhaps, clearest of all in the Old Testament, right before God brings Israel out of Egypt, the final plague. God instructs them to sacrifice and to paint the doors of their homes with the blood of the sacrifice so that judgment might pass over them. The only way salvation happens, the Bible shows us, is through a substitute. And that's what we see here in verses 5 and 6. Why do we even need the substitute? Look at the language that verses 5 and 6 uses. It says that it is because of our sin. He speaks there in verse 5 of our transgressions, our iniquities. Then he gives us this image that all of us, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned everyone to its own way. Well, it's not every day that a sheep makes international news. But that happened not long ago with one that was found in Australia. And this particular sheep had gotten separated from its herd. It had been lost. It had one astray and turned to its own way. And it was on its own for nearly 5 to 7 years. And over that period of time, if you know anything about sheep, you know that their hair needs to be sheered. It needs to be cleared off because of how quickly it grows back. And because there was no one to shear it, that hair kept growing and growing. I think we might even have a picture on the screen so you can see exactly what it is that this sheep ended up looking like. Over the course of these 5 to 7 years, it grew 77 pounds of unshorn hair. And the people that rescued this sheep, when they were interviewed about it, what they said is that it was near death. And the reason it was near death is not only because it was lost, but because the great weight that it carried on its own made it where they couldn't, that it was having trouble even continuing to live. And when we see the way that verses 5 and 6 talk about our sin, we get that same picture. That the weight of sin suppresses us. It weighs us down. We are lost sheep. We have been led astray. We seek to go our own way. We need a substitute because of the weight of our sin.

And that's exactly what Isaiah tells us that God provides for us in this servant. So look at what that substitution looks like. Verse 5 tells us he was pierced, he was crushed. Verse 6, the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And that's precisely what you can see taking place in the crucifixion. Crucifixion is one of the most gruesome ways for anyone to die. You see, when you're hung on that cross, the way you die is not through the blood that's lost when you're arms and feet are stapled into that wood. The way that you die is through suffocation. That over time, as your body weakens, as your energy declines, you can no longer lift your chest in order to capture a breath. Your lungs are crushed. That's what happened to Jesus. And you remember after he was crushed, that at the conclusion of things, a soldier comes up and drives a Roman's spear into his side and he is pierced. And there he is. Hung upon that tree. Lifeless. An what's on his head? A crown of thorns symbolizing the curse of sin that he has taken up. He is crushed. He is pierced. He takes the iniquity of each one of us upon himself. There is this great exchange that happens. Where on the cross as Jesus becomes our substitute, He takes our sin so that we might have His righteousness. That He takes our punishment so that we might experience His perfection. He is our substitute. But notice that we see in verses 7 to 9 that the other great spiritual need that He meets for us is that Easter shows us how Jesus meets our need for a sacrifice who can pay our debts. Yes, He's a substitute, but Isaiah shows us also this sacrificial language. When you look back at verse 7, it tells us he was like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. But the difference between him and the Old Testament sacrifice, is that those animals went to the sacrifice, they had the silence of naivety. Jesus, on the other hand, knows exactly where he's going. He knows exactly what's happening. And his silence is the silence of submission. He was willing for God to crush Him for our sake to become that sacrifice. In other words, the good shepherd rescues the lost sheep by becoming the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. That's why when Phillip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, the eunuch is reading this exact passage from Isaiah and in Acts 8:35 it says this:

³⁵Then Phillip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

The sacrifice of Christ is the foundation for the good news of the gospel. And notice the way Isaiah unpacks this sacrifice. Because in verse 8, we see that this is a sacrifice that leads to death. You see what it says there? He was cut off out of the land of the living. And why is that the case? Look at the end of verse 8. Because he was stricken for the transgressions of my people. That Jesus sacrifices himself for the sins of the people to the point even of death on the cross. And how is it that this coming servant is even qualified to be the type of sacrifice that can pay the debt for our sin? Well that's what verse 9 tells us at the end of it. He had no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth. Remember in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the proper sacrifice was one who was spotless and without blemish. There was no deficiency. There was no sin. And when Isaiah speaks about this coming servant who will be a sacrifice for his people, that's the language he uses. That there's no violence. That there's no malice. That He is the sinless substitute. And right here in Isaiah 53, the prophet is bringing together the language of the Old Testament day of atonement. Do you remember this in the sacrificial system of Israel that we see unpacked in Leviticus 16? We won't turn there, but what happened was, every year the people of God were commanded to send the high priest into the holy of holies in order to make sacrifice for the sins of the people. To make atonement for what they had done wrong for that year. And when the high priest would do that, it would involve two animals. The first one was a sacrifice. The second one was a substitute. So for one of those animals, they would be

brought into the temple. Their blood would be shed. It would be applied to the holy of holies. And through the application of that blood, it would wash away the sins of the people. But the second animal had a different role. The second animal was the scapegoat. And before that sacrifice was made, the high priest would take his hands, he would place them upon the head of this animal and through that symbolic act, he would place the sins of the people upon the head of this animal so that it would bear the weight of their sins. It would carry the load. And that scapegoat was sent outside the camp into the wilderness bearing the weight of sin. A sacrifice and a substitute. Those are what it takes to experience atonement. And what Isaiah is saying is that a king is coming who will do just that. He will be our substitute who takes upon our sins. He goes outside the camp to be crucified. He is sent bearing our sin. And the way that he does that is he's not just a substitute, but a sacrifice. One who will shed his blood. Sacrifice his life even to death. What that means for you and me is that when we trust in Jesus, what is true of Him is now true of us. That we have moved from darkness to light. From death to life. From sin to salvation. And from judgment to joy. And the foundation of that joy is apparent when we look at the end of this passage in verses 10 through 12. What we're going to see is that Easter reveals the hope of our victory.

So notice how Isaiah finishes this section. He says this beginning in verse 10.

¹⁰Yet 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. ¹¹Out 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. ¹²Therefore 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.

So notice what Isaiah is saying here. He's saying that the sacrifice of Christ isn't the end of the story. That His redemption leads to resurrection. That His humiliation ends up resulting in exultation. And if you look back in this text, you will not see the word resurrection used here. But the imagery that Isaiah employs about the aftermath of the death of the suffering servant makes resurrection abundantly clear. And that resurrection is the fuel of our hope this morning on Easter. So look at what he says there in verse 10. It tells us that after Jesus fulfilled God's will by going to the cross in His sacrifice, look at what it says. He shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall make his hand prosper. Why is that significant? It's because dead men can't see. He says, you will see your offspring. There will be a future for you. Even though he has been cut off from the land of the living, how could it be that he now sees? It's because he has been raised from the dead. And as he stands in newness of life, what does he see? His offspring. That seed that has been promised. The people of God who are going to be rescued from their sin. Isaiah is giving us this contrast where our sin sends us away from God like sheep without a shepherd being led astray. But through the cross and resurrection, what happens? God takes those who are far off and now brings them near no longer to be sheep astray, but sons and daughters of a risen king. That's the kind of hope that we have. And that hope, Isaiah shows us, is rooted in the work of Jesus; in the justification he brings us. It tells us there in verse 11 that he will see and be satisfied. That when the servant surpasses death and moves into life, what he sees will bring him satisfaction. Just imagine that moment for a

second. When Jesus goes into that tomb, he is wrapped, not in the swaddling clothes of a baby who has just taken his first breath. Instead, he is wrapped in the grave clothes of a supposed criminal who's just taken his last breath. He lays there dead, motionless. And then on that Easter morning, the Spirit of God begins to work in his life. And all of a sudden, a heart begins to beat. An arm begins to twitch. Lungs begin to heave. And as Isaiah points to here, eyes begin to see. And what is it that brings him satisfaction? That's what verse 11 tells us. He sees that the righteous one, my servant, makes many to be accounted righteous. That it is not just that the resurrection makes Jesus righteous, but through our faith in a resurrected king, we can be made righteous as well. This is what Scripture calls our justification. It is courtroom imagery where we are declared with a verdict, not guilty. As one of my friends likes to say, in that courtroom Jesus takes a criminal trial and turns it into an adoption celebration. We are adopted into the family of God. And that reality shows itself to be true through the hope of the victory that we now have in this risen king. That's why Isaiah finishes this prophecy. In this moment of hope in verse 12, there it says,

¹²Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,

This servant now becomes the king. The one who had lost everything, even in his death has now gained the whole world and gives gifts to his people. Just as a king would do in that culture. To give gifts to his followers. And that brings us full circles right to the beginning of this passage. Look back at that first question there in verse 1. Who has believed our report? Isaiah is confronting each one of us with a question this morning. Have we believed this report? Have we believed this promise? Have we believed this prophecy that he gave us hundreds of years before the coming of Christ? Do we believe that even though our sin is deep, the source of our salvation is sure, the hope of our victory is firm? There's all sorts of things that are different about this Easter when compared to last year. Maybe instead of hunting toilet paper, your family was back out hunting Easter eggs this week. Maybe you are going back to granny's house for brunch. We're gathered right here in this room instead of watching online. And things are different back in Israel. If you were to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre today, the doors would be open. They had been unlocked. But think about this. When those doors were locked last year, they were locked in order to protect the tomb from a threat from the outside. But think about that first Easter. Jesus goes to the cross. He's died, He is buried. That stone is rolled in front of the tomb. It is sealed. And then what happens next? Roman soldiers are placed outside of it; not to protect the tomb from a threat from the outside, but a threat from the inside. Because what happens in the resurrection of Jesus is He upends the rulers of this world. He changes all things. And isn't it fitting that on a day like today with a passage like this, that we're going to finish our time this morning coming to the Lord's Table in a celebration of this victory. You see, one of the rhythms that God has given us in the church is the celebration of the table. Where we don't just hear the gospel proclaimed, but we taste it. We experience the resurrection of Christ through the broken body and His shed blood. And in just a moment, after we pray and begin our response time, I want to invite you to these tables. To send someone from your family to grab the elements and bring them back to your seats so that we might celebrate this victory feast together. And this table is open to anybody who knows Jesus. Who's walking with Him in salvation and baptism. Who is part of the family of God. And as we do that, I challenge each one of us to examine our hearts with this passage that Paul speaks over us. 1 Corinthians 11, verse 27 and 28.

²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this now, we're praying that You have Your way amongst Your people. That if there are those that have walked in this morning with hard hearts, Father, we're asking that You would replace them, replace those hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. Open eyes to see the need of salvation. And open our hearts to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. That we might be the type of people who don't just celebrate your resurrection one day a year, but live as resurrection people throughout our lives, Lord. That's the desire of our hearts. What Isaiah promised hundreds of years before the coming of Jesus, we now celebrate in this instance. And as we ready our hearts for the table, as we partake of this broken body and this shed blood, may You seal these truths in our lives. We ask all these things in Jesus name. Amen.