

Grace of God (Toronto Spiritual Life Convention 1999)

by Eric J. Alexander

The Servant of Jehovah, the Lord Jesus Christ, suffered and died to deliver His people from spiritual bondage and sin, and to bear the judgment of a holy God upon sin.

Duration: 44:32

Scripture: Psalm 137:1, Isaiah 42:1-52, Matthew 3:17, Luke 22:37

Topics: "Suffering Servant", "Divine Redemption"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the context of the people of Israel being exiled in Babylon due to their persistent disobedience and failure to listen to God. However, the prophet Isaiah brings a message of hope, stating that God has a plan to raise up a servant who will call his people back to himself. This servant is not just a contemporary figure, but the ultimate servant of Jehovah who will deliver his people from both physical and spiritual bondage. The speaker connects this prophecy to the language used in the New Testament to introduce Jesus Christ as the servant of Jehovah, who fulfills the role of the suffering servant and sin-bearing savior of Calvary.

Transcript

And while those who came from Babylon cried to them in mockery, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. They cry, How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. And many of them doubtless recognized that this was the outcome of their persistent disobedience and their failure to hear the voice of God and that Babylon was now to be their permanent exile from God as well as from home.

And then there came this message through the prophet Isaiah that there was a plan and a purpose of God which was going to be realized whereby God would raise up a servant and call his people back to himself. But beyond that figure there is of course another figure and that is the figure of the ultimate servant of Jehovah who is going to come in the fullness of God's time. No king, no figure of the contemporary era fits the description that God gives of this other servant of His who is going to deliver His people not just from the physical bondage of Babylon but from the deeper spiritual bondage of sin.

And when we ask with the Ethiopian treasure of whom does the prophet speak? There is no question of whom the prophet ultimately is speaking. The consistent answer of the New Testament is that the servant

of Isaiah who is revealed to us as God's suffering servant is the sin bearing savior of Calvary. It is a very significant thing that practically every verse of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah is quoted in the New Testament.

And if we have any doubt about who this figure is of whom we read in detail in chapter 52 and 53 then our minds are finally convinced by the words of Jesus Christ Himself in Luke 22 after the upper room supper when He says it is written. He was numbered with the transgressors and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in Me. Yes, what is written about Me must be fulfilled.

Now it is a striking thing if you bring this song from Isaiah's prophecy 800 years before alongside the language of the New Testament as it introduces the Lord Jesus Christ to us and you notice that here in Isaiah you have the very language that is used by the eternal God Himself when He is introducing His own Son. You notice that it is not Judah's servant who is introduced to us for example in chapter 42 of Isaiah. It is Jehovah's servant.

And on that day in Matthew chapter 3 when the heavens open and God the Father calls upon His people behold My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased listen to Him and the very language is the language of Isaiah in chapter 42 verse 1 here is My servant whom I uphold My chosen one in whom I am well pleased now this you see, this figure is Jehovah's servant behold My servant and the speaker is Jehovah now the significance of that is this that pushes the horizons of our thinking back far beyond the 800 years that Isaiah lived before the coming of Christ it pushes the horizons of our thinking back beyond time itself beyond the creation of the world to the plan and purpose of God for the redemption of His people before the world began have you noticed how the Lord Jesus is described as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world and this figure, the servant of Jehovah pushes our thinking back to eternity before time began to what our forefathers would have called the covenant of redemption which was entered into by the Father and the Son in all eternity as God the Father began to purpose and plan for the salvation of His people and in His consultation as it were within the Godhead and here we are entering into something that defies our fathoming and would blow our minds if we could but properly understand it but there is a covenant that God the Father enters into with God the Son concerning the salvation of His people do you notice how the Lord Jesus throughout John's Gospel especially has His mind dominated by the idea that He has come into the world on a mission sent by the Father and there is a little phrase in John's Gospel which is almost a technical name for God the Father Him that sent me and He is aware of this I do not speak my own words but the words of Him that sent me the works that I do are not my own but His that sent me the Father who sent me is one of His constant themes now what is He referring to?

He is referring to that occasion in all eternity when God the Father setting His heart upon His people recognizing them to be a people who would fall into the depths and despair and disaster of human sin and rebellion against God began to plan the salvation of His people John Flavel, one of the great Puritans has got a great section in one of his volumes on this where he pictures God the Father saying, how shall I retain my righteous character and yet save the unrighteous people on whom I have set my heart?

He is saying something like what He said to Isaiah Whom shall I send? and who will go for us? and Flavel pictures God the Son saying, My Father I will go and I will stand surety for them Ah, but My Son God the Father replies they are bound for condemnation they will draw upon themselves the full weight of My judgment and God the Son responds let it fall upon Me, Father let it fall upon Me and the Father responds Oh, My Son, what a cost what a price let it be so, Father the Son replies and in the fullness of the time the Father sent the Son to be the Savior now, in that sense the Lord Jesus Christ is Jehovah's servant to achieve our salvation that's why Paul says He who was in the form of God counted not equality with God a

thing to be grasped onto but humbled himself and what did he become? he became a servant but my dear friends long before he became the servant figure who washed our feet he was the Father's servant for our salvation and when he became man took our flesh and wore our human nature this is what he was doing he was becoming the servant figure who is described for us here and at that moment at his anointing and his baptism the heavens opened and the Father says and behold my Son my servant, my chosen one in whom I am well pleased there was not another human being in all the universe that day with whom the Father was well pleased and he came to bear our sin in his body on the tree and when he had done it he comes to the Father at the beginning of John 17 and do you remember what he says?

Father I have finished the work that you gave me to do glorify me with the glory I had with you before the world began and the 52nd chapter of Isaiah tells us this is what indeed happened to him see my servant he will act wisely he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted and this in response to his cry to the Father now this is something of what Isaiah sees oh you say Isaiah didn't see that? didn't he? well Jesus says he did in John 12, 41 he says Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus glory and spoke about him well now you will see in the first and last stanzas of this song the first stanza begins at verse 13 of chapter 52 and the last at verse 10 of chapter 53 but he is the one who bears the glory of perfect manhood that is what happened when the Lord Jesus came into the world

you see he revealed the true glory not just of the Father but the true glory of perfect manhood and this is why he says see my servant will act wisely he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted and in verse 10 of chapter 53 he says though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering he will see his offspring and prolong his days and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand therefore I will give him a portion among the great and he will divide the spoils with the strong but he is the one who bears the marks of true glory of the glory of the perfect man this is why Martin Luther so frequently speaks of Jesus as the proper man and what he means by that is creation has never seen since the formation of Adam and Eve creation has never seen perfect humanity until the coming of the Son

of God behold my son hear him I am well pleased with him now that is a very important thing we do not think enough about the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ about the glory of everything that the real beauty of humanity in all its perfection was radiated in the life of our Lord Jesus not only in his being I am sure this is why we do not know what Jesus physical appearance was like you know people often wonder what was he really like I am sure we could not conceptualize it even if we were given a description of it it is because he is perfect humanity but he is perfect humanity not only in his physical being but in his moral caliber and that of course is why Jesus perfect obedience is such a vital element in his qualification to be our Savior there was no sin of his own which he

had to atone for and so the hymn rightly emphasizes it saying my Savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgression from view now because of this you see because of Jesus being the perfect proper man it is an extraordinary thing that whereas God the Father is going to raise him and lift him up and highly exalt him when he came to the earth to be our sin bearer there is a description of him beginning in chapter 52 at verse 14 which sounds like some grotesquely disfigured being distorted beyond all understanding or recognition notice it in verse 14 of chapter 52 just as there were many who were appalled at him his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness now my dear friends I have to tell you again this is Jehovah's servant this is

the one of whom scripture says he is the fairest amongst ten thousand the bright and morning star the altogether lovely one and here he is being described to us as the one who is marred beyond human

likeness his appearance is so disfigured beyond that of any man and in verse 2 of chapter 53 this is amplified for us halfway through verse 2 he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him nothing in his appearance that we should desire him he was despised and rejected of men a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not now hold to that for a moment will you and will you recognize with me again that here in this figure from whom men hide their faces did you remember last night we were looking at Isaiah 6 where

the angel figures brought before us in the seraphim held their wings over their faces because they could not bear the glory of God burning out in their presence but here, here are ordinary human beings like ourselves and when they see the servant of Jehovah they put their hands over their faces now you do that on occasions don't you or you've seen people do it you may have seen some horrifyingly disfiguring accident or some ghastly illness and I've seen people putting their hands over their faces one of my friends went to the help of some of the people in Lockerbie when the Pan American jet was shot down by that bomb he was minister nearby and he said he had never seen so many people with their hands over their faces crying out Oh God, Oh God because there were people hanging from trees

disfigured and distorted and broken that's the very language that's the very language and I said to you it was to the one of whom we sing fairest Lord Jesus it was gazing upon him he who is admired by angels and archangels as the brightened morning star they cannot look upon him because the sight is so repulsive now we need to ask what and I said reverently what in God's name produced that reaction well there are three answers in the song there is first the human answer what produced such disfigurement and such deformity and such an appalling somebody sinned to cause this they knew that they said who sinned this man or his parents that he is in this dreadful and appalling condition now they said we esteemed him smitten by God and afflicted and they thought he was bearing the punishment of

his own sin and yet you notice what the prophet sings of in the song in verse 9 he had done no violence neither was any deceit in his mouth but that was the human answer you notice what is the prophet's answer to the question what brought this dread sight in the servant of Jehovah it begins in verse 4 with that single word which expresses the dawning of the truth upon someone's understanding the opening of blinded eyes the sudden awareness of the truth which has been hidden from them it's the one word surely you know not long after I was converted I was taken by my brother who led me to Christ I was taken to a performance of the Messiah in Glasgow I'd never heard it before but the one word that rang out in that great auditorium and stabbed my heart was the word that begins one of the

greatest of Handel's choruses surely and it is repeated again and again do you know it one of the most moving things to me in all music surely he has borne our sin and carried our sorrow and the word is repeated again surely now it is as though the light has begun to dawn you see it is as though understanding is being opened and they are saying surely this is what it was all about this is why the servant of Jehovah is one whom men hide their faces from surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows you can almost see it in the use of the pronouns have you noticed that in the last bit of verse 4 and throughout verse 5 surely he took up our infirmities he carried our sorrows verse 5 he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that

brought us peace was upon him by his wounds we are healed you cannot get away from it even there is theology in pronouns you know and there is an abundance of it here here is the prophet saying it has something to do with him and it has something absolutely parallel to do with us what he bore he bore for our sake in our place let me just draw your attention to it and how the prophet traces the meaning both of

human sin and of the servant's suffering from the circumference of sin to the center of it and from the circumference of his suffering to the heart of it notice what it is he says in verse 5 there are four descriptions of human sin do you notice it? it is transgression it is iniquity it is dis-peace because the punishment that brought us peace for our dis-peace was upon him and it is

dis-ease by his wounds we are healed now transgression is the outward act of sin it is the public rebellion against the law of God and in our actions that's what transgression is iniquity is something that goes deeper than just the public and outward transgression of the law of God it speaks of an inward sickness dis-peace speaks to us of that deeper reality in the human soul which is the result of rebelling against God there is no peace says my God to the wicked for the simple reason that sin expresses itself not just in public transgression and in the inward reality of the disease of sin but in this dis-peace which invades every area of our being and dis-ease all the reality of the sickness that sin brings to every area of our being that brother I was telling you about who led me to

Christ when he was 29 he and just home from his honeymoon he was taken into hospital and diagnosed as having an almost inoperable and certainly an incurable cancer which had never been evident before and when I went to see the doctor who was a family friend who was the anesthetist I said to him where exactly is the cancer he said well I'm afraid that's not really the question the question is where is it not and that's the problem of human sin not where is it but where is it not that's what we mean when we talk about total depravity we don't mean that somebody is as bad as they ever could be what we mean is that there is no area of life that is not touched by our sin but if that is the description of sin will you notice how it is matched so perfectly in the wisdom and mercy of God are you

beginning to see what grace now is like when the Lord Jesus Christ's sufferings are described to us he was pierced that is a description of the outward assault upon his body he was crushed or bruised that is the kind of wound that goes beyond the outward to the area beneath sight he was punished now the NIV doesn't do us a favor here it's a good translation by and large you know but it's missed the point here the King James Version has the proper translation he was chastised the chastisement of our peace was upon him what's the point about chastisement and what's the difference between chastisement and punishment well of course you know don't you the chastisement is a father's act that's the point a stranger may punish some child but only a father can chastise them and in some mysterious

sense these wounds by which our sickness is healed were the chastisement of the father that of course you see is what our Lord Jesus Christ is bearing in his death upon the cross what he is bearing is not so much the outward suffering in his body, multitudes of people have borne that what he is bearing is the judgment of a holy God upon sin what he is bearing is the wrath of a righteous God upon sinners and that of course is what makes sin serious isn't it you ever thought about this what makes sin serious is not what it does to me although God knows how sin dreadfully messes up human life John Calvin says when we find ourselves appalled by the servant's marred appearance we need to reckon afresh that here at Calvary we gaze upon our own disfigured humanity and that is what we are seeing

at the cross when we see the disfigured Son of God bearing our sin we are reminded that sin does not leave us unscarred nor of course is the serious thing about sin what it does to other people although we all of us in some sense have discovered that haven't we that sin makes a mess of other people's lives you speak to the wife who has been the victim of her husband's philandering and you will know how someone's sin can break someone else it is a figment of the imagination however sophisticated in our own times and in our television age that sin is fun sin is often very pleasurable but that's not its last word or

effect its ultimate effect is to disfigure and destroy but that's not its most serious feature the most serious thing about human sin is not what it does to me or to anybody else

but what it does to a holy God it draws down his wrath and judgment and my dear friends that's the really serious thing about being outside of Christ there is no shelter from the wrath of God anywhere else but in him but there is not only a human answer and a prophetic answer to the question what has brought this disfigurement to the son of God there is a divine answer do you notice at the end of verse 6 we all like sheep have gone astray each of us has turned to his own way now listen to this and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all he was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth he was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is silent so he did not open his mouth by oppression and judgment he was taken away he was cut off from the land

of the living for the transgression of my people why was this look at verse 10 with me yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer it was the Lord who made his life a guilt offering now have you then begun to think about how it is that Jesus says in Gethsemane to the father father if it be possible now put this into the context of that eternal covenant of redemption if it be possible let this cup pass from me nevertheless not my will but your will be done and there and then within the Godhead there was taking place something that defies our understanding as the judgment of a holy God fell upon his son you know how the hymn puts it oh Christ what burdens bowed thy head my load was laid on thee Jehovah lifted up his sword oh Christ it fell on thee thou was sore stricken

of thy God there's not one stroke for me thy tears thy blood beneath it flowed thy bruising healeth me my dear friends that's grace when the eternal God comes and sees us disfigured in all the ugliness of our sin and failure when he sees us in our rebellious state against him when he sees us without anything in us that would attract him to us yet goes to this extent to embrace us have you ever heard of a physician like this who takes upon him our dis-ease in order that we might find healing in his wounds that is where grace finds its ultimate expression the free mercy of God which Isaiah delighted to proclaim an infinitely costly love for infinitely unworthy sinners but I need to tell you this evening that one of the reasons we need to come back again and again and again to all that that

chapter teaches us one of the reasons we need to come back to it is that that's how God goes on dealing with his people grace is not just the manner in which he brings us into the kingdom grace is the means by which he takes us on so that later in his life the apostle is able to say and he wasn't exercising some mock humility by the grace of God I am what I am beloved, that's the answer to every foolish pride that ever tries to rise up in our hearts by the grace of God I am what I am and the language of the believing heart will be the language of the hymn we are going to sing presently amazing grace amazing love how can it be that thou my God die for me you can almost tell where somebody is spiritually by how much they are amazed at the grace of an infinitely merciful God let's pray

together blessed Lord our minds cannot begin to contain nor our hearts encompass the wonders of your grace to us in Jesus Christ we truly stand amazed in your presence what manner of love is this we cry Lord continue to lead us to explore the riches of your grace more and more day by day for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and in his perfect name we ask it Amen

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