

Studies in Isaiah - Part 11

by Harry Ironside

The sermon explores the profound implications of Isaiah 53, emphasizing Christ's role as the suffering servant and the hope of redemption for Israel and all humanity.

Duration: 27:47

Scripture: Isaiah 53:6, Isaiah 54:1, Isaiah 55:1

Topics: "Expository"

Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker reflects on a text that he has been trying to preach for sixty years. The text is 'All we like sheep have gone astray.' The speaker shares a story about a troubled young man who approached a preacher for guidance on salvation. The speaker then delves into the meaning of the text, highlighting the fallen state of humanity and the hope of redemption through God's sacrifice. The sermon concludes with a mention of an upcoming examination and a reminder to remember the key points discussed throughout the teaching.

Transcript

Very holy of holies, I might say, in this wonderful book of the Prophet Isaiah, in which we are to consider the most complete messianic prophecy that we have anywhere in the Old Testament. And to those of us who were brought up in Christian homes, and have always had the Christian viewpoint of this chapter, it's a matter of amazement that anybody could ever seek to apply it to others, to anyone else but the Lord Jesus Christ. But it's well for us to remember that those who haven't had such instruction, as many of us have had from our childhood up, have had great difficulty with this passage.

The Jewish people, almost as a whole, apply it to the nation itself. And in olden days, while it was recognized by the rabbis as having to do with Messiah, it was a parcel to them, because they read in certain scriptures of the glories of Messiah's reign, and then here they read of a suffering Messiah. And so many of them thought that there would be two Messiahs.

One they called Messiah ben Davi, Messiah, the anointed, the son of David, and the other, Messiah ben Yosef, the son of Joseph. You remember how Jacob had said, speaking of Joseph's suffering, the one who was separated from his brethren and so on, he says, from fence, from fence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. And so many of the rabbis considered that the sufferer of Isaiah 13 was the one who would spring from the house of Joseph, while the glorified Messiah, the one reigning in power and glory, would come from the house of David.

But almost unanimously, before the Christian era, all the Jewish teachers whose writings have come down to us, either by quotation or in direct form, were agreed that the passage did refer to Messiah in some way. But it was after the Lord Jesus came and fitted in so exactly to this picture that the Jews, having rejected Christ, the teachers of the Jews, I should say, having rejected Christ, found it necessary to apply the passage in some other way, to give another interpretation to it. And so today if you talk with a Jew who is reasonably familiar with his scriptures, many of them are not, you know, we Gentiles take it for granted that every Jew knows the Old Testament, but many have never read it at all, they're not familiar with it.

But if you find one who is, you'll generally find in talking with him that he'll try to make out that the sufferer here is the Jewish nation itself, and not any one individual. And he'll go back in the book of the prophet Isaiah and show how Israel is called the servant of Jehovah and so on. And so here it says, Behold, my servant shall be exalted, extolled, and shall deal prudently, and so forth.

And they take it for granted that's the same as Israel, that the nation is the servant and receives it for suffering. This is the man whose name is the branch, as a root out of a dry ground. He grew up out of the dry ground of formalistic Israel, the one lovely plant that Jehovah gazed down upon with approval, so that he could render heavens above him and say, This is my beloved son, in whom I found all form as a tender plant.

A lovely plant and a root out of a dry ground. But so far as we are concerned, the next verse says, He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there's no beauty that we should desire in him. I think that sometimes some Christian teachers have misused that expression.

He has misunderstood that expression, he has no form nor comeliness. One dear friend of mine, dear good friend of mine, a very fine Bible teacher, I'm not going to mention his name, as though I might seem to be especially critical, but he teaches, both in a book he has written and often over the radio, that he believes that Christians have been all wrong, down through the centuries, in thinking of the Lord Jesus Christ as a person of a beautiful face, handsome face, as is often portrayed by different painters. This dear brother even goes so far as to say that he believes that the Lord Jesus Christ as man was positively repulsive in appearance, no form nor comeliness, absolutely repulsive, so that nobody would like to look upon him.

But that's not in accordance with other scriptures. In the 45th Psalm we read of our blessed Lord, Thou art fairer than the sons of man. And I think we have every reason to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, being the only sinless child that was ever born into the world, came into this world with a perfect human body.

And he would be perfectly beautiful. And as he grew up as a young man, and later matured, he would be of lovely appearance, splendid appearance. But those who loved their sins and listened to his teaching and were angered by it, saw in him no beauty that they should desire him.

It wasn't a question of physical characteristics. Because of the sufferings he endured, his visage became large more than any man, and his form more than the sons of man. But I think we're right in believing that as man, here on earth, the second man, the last Adam, he was, as to his human form, face and features, absolutely perfect.

But men looked upon him with disgust and disdain because he interfered, his teaching interfered, with the lives that they loved to live. When we shall see him, there's no beauty that we should desire him. And so the prophet goes on to say in the next three verses, he was despised, and we esteemed him, am I quoting

correctly? Of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, this word, our faces from it.

He was despised, and we esteemed him not. Our faces from the eyes of his townsmen. But as our peace was made, fell upon him.

And the result, with his stripes we are healed. And then in the next verse you have God, as it were, balancing the books of the world. Two debit entries and one credit entry.

The two debit entries, all we like sheep have gone astray. There's the whole fallen human race. We have turned everyone to his own way.

There's each individual's own personal sin. And then the credit entry that would clear it all, and the books of God, if men would but receive it. Jehovah hath laid in him the iniquity of us all.

What a wonderful... You know, to me that's the most wonderful text in the Bible. I've been trying to preach for 60 years. That's the first text I ever preached on.

I was just a boy of 14 years old, and got out in the street in Los Angeles, the television army, and I started speaking that text. I only meant to speak five minutes, but a half an hour later the captain leaned over and said, my boy, we should have been in the hall about 20 minutes ago. You'll have to tell us the rest another time.

And so I've been trying to tell the rest all through the years since. But it's a text I never get beyond. Oh, we like sheep of God astray.

Remember the story of the young man who was so troubled about his soul. He'd been listening to Dr. W.B. Mackay, the author of Grace and Truth, when he was preaching a large hall in London. And Dr. Mackay had to hurry to get an underground train to go to the place he was staying at the close of meeting each night.

And so he was hurrying along one night when this young man came behind him and called out, Doctor, can't you wait a minute? I want to talk to you. I'm in such trouble about my soul. Doctor, come along.

What is it? I've got to catch a train. Well, he said, Doctor, I've been listening to you, but I don't seem to get it clear. I want to be saved.

Can't you make it clear to me? And he said, well, I'm sorry, I can't stop tonight. But have you got a Bible? No, he said, I haven't. Well, he said, will you be at the meeting tomorrow night? Well, he said, I've been coming every night.

Well, he said, take my Bible then. Now listen to me. Go to the nearest lamppost.

Turn to Isaiah 53 and 6. Then low down and go in at the first stall and stand up straight and come out at the last. Good night. And down he went to get his underground train.

And the young fellow stood there with a Bible in his hand. About 100, did he say to me? Go to the nearest... Turn to Isaiah 53 and 6. All right, he hunted through the Bible and he found it. Go to the... First he said, go to the nearest lamppost.

So he went where the light was shining on it. Then turn to Isaiah 53 and 6. Now what did he say? Then low down and go in at the first stall. He looked at it.

Sure enough, it began with all. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

And in a moment it burst upon his soul what the doctor meant. Just take your place before God is a sinner. Go in at that stall.

Acknowledge that you've gone astray, that you're a lost sinner. And then what else did Dr. McKay say? Stand up straight and come out at the last stall. He looked at it again.

Sure enough, it ended with all. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of it all. And Dr. McKay came to the platform the next night.

He looked around to see if anybody... The boy was there with his book. Suddenly he came hurrying up the aisle. He handed it to him.

He said, it's all right, doctor. I got in at the first stall and got out at the last. And so he knew that his soul was saved.

Then it goes on to speak of the trial of the Lord. Isn't it he's taken from prison from judgment? I could say it all over, but I didn't... Oh yes, he was oppressed and he was afflicted. Yet he opened not his mouth.

He was taken from prison from judgment. He brought us a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep before shears is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

He's taken from prison from judgment, who shall declare his generation. So he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people was he stricken. This brings before us his mock trial.

Taken from one place to another. And his case was heard, but there was nobody to speak for him. It was all contrary to law.

And, but yet God permitted it. He didn't have anything to say for himself. Pilate wondered that he didn't speak.

Herod tried to make him speak. He refused to do it. As a lamb dumb before his shearers, so he opened not his mouth.

And then this question comes in, who shall declare his generation? Sometimes, some have translated, who shall declare his manner of life? Have you ever noticed how careful God was to see that his manner of life was declared? He was condemned to die on false evidence as a felon. He was condemned to die as though guilty of sedition against Caesar, against imperial Rome. But God saw to it that his manner of life was fully declared.

So that actually he was justified even before Pilate. Pilate's wife sent the message, have thou nothing to do with the blood of this just man. For I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him.

Pilate himself took water and washed his hands and said, I find no fault in him. Then as he hung upon that cross, left to die as a felon, the thief by his side, turned to his fellow and said, Dost thou not fear God,

seeing we are in the same condemnation? But this man hath done nothing amiss. So God saw to it that that declaration was made, even on the very cross, this man hath done nothing amiss.

Yet he was allowed to suffer, why? Because he was the great sin offering. He was taken from prison, from judgment, and for the third generation he was cut off of the land of the living. For the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Therefore, God says that he shall come back from the grave in resurrection life. And how wonderful that is, anything like that. I know that when I say that, somebody at once thinks of the question, the disciples, are there few that be saved? But remember, that was a question.

The Lord says, men of powers, for our iniquities. The chastisement for those of us who try to preach the gospel. He shall divide who be saved.

He did say, strive to enter in at the straight gate. Will there be few saved? There'll be far more in heaven than there'll ever be in hell. Because all the little ones are going to be in heaven.

All the millions and millions of those who have died in immaturity before coming to years of accountability, they'll all be in heaven. For Jesus said, it's not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. And of course, all those who've never had, who've been mentally defective and never been capable of accepting or rejecting Christ, they'll all be covered by his blood.

And then in addition, all those who've turned to him in repentance and trusted him as his savior. So he'll divide the spoiled with the strong. God is going to reward the Lord Jesus according to his own thoughts of that which his Son has accomplished.

Men may think lightly of it, but God never does. I've often told that incident of a friend of mine, Mr. Joseph Parker, who was visiting in a hospital and he said to me, when I met him on the Monday, this was on the Sunday, he'd been in the hospital on the Monday, oh, he said, I had such a good time yesterday. I said, what was it, Mr. Parker? Well, he said, you know, I work so steadily all week long that I just have to use Sunday afternoon for recreation.

And so he said, I just leave my home and get out and I go over to the hospital to have recreation every Sunday afternoon. I go from bed to bed talking to the people about Jesus. That's even better than going out playing golf on Sunday afternoon.

And he said, you know, yesterday I came into the hospital and they were just putting the, they had pulled the screens tight around one bed. And I said to the nurse, somebody dying there, she said, yes, Mr. Parker, a man, the priest has just been here and given him the last rite to the church. He won't last many minutes.

Mr. Parker said, could I, could I look in and see him? She said, well, you know, we're not supposed to let anybody see a patient unless his own relatives, after the priest has given him the last rite. But I know you so well, I'm sure it would be all right to let you look in. So he went behind the screen and there the man lay, just gasping for breath, his eyes shut, and a crucifix on his breast.

And Mr. Parker said, I thought, oh, if he doesn't know Christ, he's going out into a lost eternity. So he said, I just prayed, Lord, Lord, if he's not saved, give him consciousness and help me to say a word that would point him to Christ. And then he said involuntarily, I just, somewhere or another, something moved me, I

stood down, picked up that crucifix.

And the man kind of stirred and opened his eyes and blinked a bit. And as I held the crucifix up, he looked kind of anxious and worried. And I said to him, he's a wonderful Savior.

And I just pointed to the figure of the man on the cross. He's a wonderful Savior. And the man ejaculated, yes, yes, I love, I love the crucifix.

I want to die with it on my breast. Put it back, please. I hope it will help me to get through purgatory.

I hope it will help me. And Mr. Parker said, not the crucifix, but the one that died. The man that died on the cross, he is the Savior, God's own blessed Son.

You know, the man looked up, oh, oh, he said, I see. Oh, I never understood before. Not the crucifix, but the man that died, the Son of God that died.

Yes, he died for sinners. He died for you. And if you look to him in faith, he'll take you through to heaven.

Oh, yes, that I never understood before. And in a moment or two, he closed his eyes and he was gone. Mr. Parker said, I put the crucifix back in his breast.

I knew it couldn't do him any harm now. And he said to me, you know, and he's telling me about it. His face was just radiant.

He's such a dear old thing. He said, I knew this, that God thinks so much of the work of his Son, he'll have everybody in heaven who'll give him the least excuse for getting them there. Because they'll be there to their praise and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, we never could get through a chapter like this, but I've just briefly gone over it. And now, will you notice the first word of the next chapter? Have you ever noticed it before? After all the darkness and the gloom and the suffering and the sorrow of the cross? Do you see what the first word of the next chapter is? What is it? Sing! Yes. Oh, after all that Jesus has done.

Sing! Sing! It's the Spirit of God calling upon people to rejoice. And here, of course, it's directly addressed to the remnant of Israel in the last days. Sing, O barren, how that it's not there.

And he goes on to picture Israel turning to the Lord in that day and being used of God to bring a great multitude of Gentiles so that they desolate as more children than the married wife. She's been set aside for so long. And the marriage hasn't yet taken place.

She hasn't yet been united to her bridegroom as she will be when gathered back to the land. But still God uses that remnant to bring a great host to the Lord in that coming day. And all who are ever saved, both in millennial days and now, will be saved through the work of Isaiah 53.

Now, the latter part of that chapter is a precious portion I'd like my wife to read. I wish I could carry it all in my memory. But, you know, I think I've got a wonderful memory to work for me here.

Beginning with verse 4, Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed, neither be thou confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame, for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and

thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord has called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth when thou hast refused, saith thy God.

For a small moment have I forsaken thee, so that great mercies will I gather thee. In a little while I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. But this is as the waters of Noah unto me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be rocked with thee, nor abused thee.

For the mountains shall be carved, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. What a wonderful promise this is. Remember, this is God's word to Israel.

You know, we Christians are such thieves. We steal so many things that belong to Israel and try to apply them to ourselves. I don't know whether your Bible is like one I used to have.

I think mine was a Baxter Bible. And at the head of so many of these chapters in Isaiah, it would say, curses on the Jews, punishments on the Jews, judgments on the Jews. And then when it came to the other side, it would say, blessings of the Church, glory for the Church.

All the judgment passages were definitely applied to the Jews, but all the glory passages were applied to the Church. But this passage refers to the day of Israel's blessing. God is going to bring them back to Himself.

He'll not keep His fury forever. As the waters of Noah, He says, this shall be as the waters of Noah unto me. For He promised that never again should the earth be destroyed with a flood.

Just as truly He has promised that this nation, Israel, shall never be utterly destroyed, that someday a remnant will be saved and that will become a great nation and Israel shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the whole earth with fruit. Well then, we come to the next chapter, and again it begins with an interesting word. Do you notice what that word is? What is it? Ho! Yes.

It's a call to other people. My old associate, Dr. Porter, used to preach a great sermon on this, I always thought. I heard him two or three times on it.

And he took that ho as hello. He would always read it that way. He said, this is a telephone chapter.

It's a call to that. Send a message all over, calling people to hear. Ho! Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.

He that hath no money, come. Buy wine and milk without money and without price. Tell me there's no grace in the Old Testament.

This is pure grace. Without money and without price. And it goes on, inviting people to come and receive the gospel message and believe it.

And it's a call to the nation of Israel to put themselves in the place where they may appropriate the blessing which God has for them. And it's here, and the nations too are invited to join with them in it. And so the word comes, seek ye the Lord while ye may be found.

Call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. And let him return unto the Lord, and he'll have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

And so the chapter goes on to show how ready God is to take up those who turn to him in confession of sin and trust his love. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For if the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not silver but water into earth, and maketh it bring forth and blood, that it may be a seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me, Lord, but it shall accomplish that which I bid, and it shall prosper in the things whereto I think. For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace.

The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you in the scene, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorns shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the drier shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord by name for everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. What a wonderful passage this is.

No wonder my friend, the Cambridge man, said of Isaiah how that fellow can swing the language. How beautiful Isaiah's periods are. How his own soul must have been stirred as he gave forth this proclamation.

And what an encouragement it should be for every servant of Christ to remember that God has declared that his word will accomplish that of which he has said it. We sometimes may preach and we get a little bit discouraged and think maybe we're just talking as it were against a brazen wall, but God's word is never going to return to him, boy. So the prophetic word is going to have a complete fulfillment in God's due time.

Remember when the Ethiopian, the treasurer of Queen Candace was traveling down the Gaza Road on his way back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem. He was reading in the book of Isaiah when Philip came. And he was reading this very passage, reading it in the Septuagint version.

That, of course, accounts for the slight difference of wording. He was reading it in the Greek tradition. And when Philip was to the chariot, what he was reading, evidently heard too, evidently he was one of these men who have to read aloud.

Poor readers always move their lips when they read or read aloud. Good readers read the paragraph. They don't read word after word.

And I'm so thankful that I was a good reader when I had some eyes. Because if I hadn't, I don't know why I do today. And I hope you'll cultivate the habit as far as you can of reading paragraphically.

Don't just try to read word by word. You'll never get through. But grasp, look at a whole paragraph and pass on to the next one.

That's the proper way to read. I'm going to stop here today though it's not the end of the section. The section goes on to the end of chapter 57.

But we have just three more class hours. And so that leaves us nine chapters for the three more hours. And then you'll have examination on Friday afternoon.

And let me say in view of the examination that I don't want you to think I'm going to put any catch questions or anything like that. But I hope you'll have some of the outstanding things in mind that we've drawn attention to like the structure of the book and its three great sections. You want to get that clearly in mind.

And the number of chapters in each section. And then the divisions of the third section in chapter 40 to 48 and 49 to 57 and what they deal with. We've taken up all that.

And try and get fixed in your mind some of these great Messianic prophecies. Well, probably they are fixed there already. I'm sure that when the time comes you'll not have any difficulty in handling the examination.

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