

# Easter Through The Lens of Christmas

TEXT: ISAIAH 52:13-53:12 (ESV)



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December 14, 2008

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## Christmas & Easter

For three months now we've been pretty much singularly devoted to studying the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry. For at least the first three months of next year we'll continue on with the Easter story. By Easter Sunday, we'll have logged upwards of 15 hours immersed in this story of Christ and Him crucified. In our fast paced, sound byte culture, it takes discipline to sustain a thought for any length of time, but this is exactly what we're doing with this season of study.

At Easter we celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection; at Christmas, His birth. As a church, we find ourselves at an interesting intersection here, with our minds on Easter during a season focused on His birth. How do Easter and Christmas connect? What does one holiday teach us about the other? This will be the focus of the next two weeks. Today we'll look at Easter through the lens of Christmas, and next week we'll flip that equation and look at Christmas through the lens of Easter.

## The Servant Songs of Isaiah

One of the most beautiful crescendo's of Scripture is found between Isaiah 42 and 53—Isaiah's "Servant Songs." These four songs vividly describe the One God would send to deliver Israel and secure her redemption before Him. The advent of these prophecies would come at Christmas and the accomplishment of them at Easter. Our text today is the crown jewel of these songs—the 4<sup>th</sup>. These songs present us with a picture of Christ in the Old Testament in how they describe the life He'd live, the death He would die and why these things would happen. Before we read today's text, let's find the 4<sup>th</sup> Servant Song in the context of the 3 before it, and see how they point to Christ.

**THE FIRST SERVANT SONG** (Isa 42:1-9) speaks to the truth that God will send a servant to bless His people—One who will be a "light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons." (Isa 42:6-7) This is the One who is coming. When Jesus was presented in the temple as a baby, the old cleric Simeon said when he saw Him, "My eyes have seen your salvation you have prepared before all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Lk 2:30-32)

**THE SECOND SERVANT SONG** (Isa 49:1-50:3) clarifies that while this servant is from Israel, this is not a reference to the nation as a whole, but to an individual from among them—"The Lord has called me from the womb, from the body of my mother He named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword... He made me a polished arrow." (Isa 49:1-2) This prophecy was fulfilled when the angel appeared to Mary, saying God was sending His Son into the world, and she'd give birth to Him. She was to name Him Jesus. (Lk 1:26-38) His would be a ministry of words like a sword.

**THE THIRD SERVANT SONG** (Isa 50:4-9) adds that His ministry will also be one of action. Not only will He declare the Lord's salvation, He will personally suffer on behalf of God's people in order to hold up a salvation that will endure forever, saying, "I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard. I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting." (cf. Mk 14:65) *But the Lord God helps me; so I have not been disgraced. Therefore I have set my face like a flint,* (cf. Lk 9:51) *and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near."* (Isa 50:6-8) These details were fulfilled in Christ as He offered up His life.

So these three songs announce that **1)** the Servant of the Lord is coming. His work will be both liberating and reconciling. **2)** He will not be a nation or philosophy, but a man born of a woman, named by God. His will be a ministry of words. **3)** It will also be one of action—specifically suffering on behalf of God's people. But the story can't end here because we still don't know what His suffering has to do with our salvation. How does the suffering of one man come to reconcile another to God? This is what **THE FOURTH SERVANT SONG** takes up.

## Isaiah 52:13-53:12

<sup>52:13</sup> *Behold my servant shall act wisely;  
he shall be high and lifted up,  
and shall be exalted.*

<sup>14</sup> *As many were astonished at you—  
his appearance was so marred, beyond human  
resemblance,*

*and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—*

<sup>15</sup> *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.*

<sup>53:1</sup> *Who has believed what he has heard from us?  
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*

<sup>2</sup> *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.*

<sup>3</sup> *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.*

<sup>4</sup> *Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.*

<sup>5</sup> *But he was wounded for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his stripes we are healed.*

<sup>6</sup> *We all, 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.*

<sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and he was afflicted,  
yet he did not open 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.

<sup>8</sup>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?

<sup>9</sup>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.

<sup>10</sup>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.

<sup>11</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup>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.

## The Divinity of Jesus Vs. 52:13-15

These five stanzas reveal not only the identity of the Servant of the Lord, but specifically how He'll save God's people. But the song begins with the ending. The Servant will act wisely and, in the end, be exalted and lifted up, telling us that the Servant was known long before His arrival, and the result of His coming was fixed and certain. He won't be merely acted upon. Instead, He will be one who acts in concert with God, knows the mind of God and is one in purpose with God. Nothing in all creation will be able to alter His course. He'll take a beating along the way so bad that people won't even recognize Him, but in the end, by His word and His presence, the kings of this world will shut their mouths in humbled silence before Him. This servant is no mere mortal, but is one with God—the One John referred to as the Word Who became flesh and dwelt among us. (Jn 1:14)

## The Humanity of Jesus Vs. 53:1-3

The next stanza says that while He is One with the Father, He is also in every way human. This is a mystery—the dual nature of Christ Who was fully God and fully man. Church councils have been called and tomes have been written on the subject, but from Isaiah's words, he labors to make us see that this Servant of the Lord will be in every way ordinary in appearance. His birth will be like a root out of dry ground—unnoticed by almost everyone. He won't sparkle in the sunlight. He won't be devastatingly handsome or a foot taller than everyone else. He'll have no beauty that people would be drawn to Him by His appearance. Nor will he have an easy life. He'll be a man whose life is filled with sorrow. People will despise him.

## The Affliction of God Vs. 53:4-6

But this Servant, both human and divine, will take upon Himself our grief. He'll carry our sorrows. Yes, there will be men in positions of power who will bring pain upon pain into His last days. But they will not be the ones to crush Him. God will be the one to do that. The Servant of the Lord will be smitten by God and afflicted. He will be wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that will bring us peace will be laid upon Him. By His stripes we will be healed. And why? Because we all have gone astray and deserve God's wrath. But God will lay upon His servant the iniquity of His people. He'll take God's wrath toward our sins upon Himself.

## The Submission of Jesus Vs. 53:7-9

The fourth stanza reveals something astounding—God will bring the full weight of His wrath toward the sins of His people upon His Servant, and the Servant will **cooperate** and submit to that process. When He could've spoken to defend Himself, He stayed silent, like a lamb led to its slaughter. He'd be struck dead, cut off from the land of the living for the sins of God's people. He would die among the guilty and be buried in a rich man's tomb, but He Himself would be guiltless of wrongdoing. He'd done no violence. No deceit was in His mouth. The Lord's Servant—fully God, fully man—would come and be smitten by God and He would yield willingly, even unto His own death.

## The Reason For It All Vs. 53:10-12

And how would that translate to our peace with God? The death we deserved to die, He would undergo for us. His life was offered up as a guilt offering on our behalf, and it was God's will for this to happen. (vs. 10) He'd stand in for us and be our substitute in death, bearing the sins of many and taking upon Himself the full weight of God's wrath toward our rebellion against His holy and proper place as the only worthy object of our worship. And God would look upon this substitution and be satisfied. The Servant of the Lord would "*make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities.*" (Isa 53:11)

You can't understand Easter unless you see it through the lens of Christmas, and you can't make sense of Christmas without the Cross. We celebrate the birth of our Savior only in part for His ministry of words. Yes, we treasure His teaching and example. But He was born of a woman for a purpose greater than His ministry of words. He came to *do* something we couldn't do for ourselves—live the perfect life we have all failed to live, a failure which has set us at enmity with our Maker.

And Jesus absorbed the full weight of God's wrath toward our rejection of Him. The Apostle Peter wrote, "*He bore our sins in His body on the tree... By His wounds you have been healed.*" (1 Pet 2:24)

God did not perform some magic trick to secure your salvation. It was a life for a life—the Suffering Servant, His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, incarnate as a living, breathing man who died a real death in your place—a substitution you couldn't have without Christmas. But since death held no claim on Him, He rose on Easter, securing our victory over death forever. Christmas means there would be a suffering servant who would be wounded for your transgressions and crushed for your iniquity, but by His wounds you are healed. So may our celebration of Christmas be marked by your worship of Jesus.