

ISAIAH 52:13-15
THE PRUDENT SERVANT ASTONISHES ALL

Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you---so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men---so shall He sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.

Which farmer values a bumper crop more—the one who has high yields every year, or the one who has had poor years, even no-crop years? It's the one who has seen the bottom, isn't it? Chapters 40-66 of Isaiah are similar to that scenario. The Lord's Word speaks glowingly and sweetly of the great rescue and great freedom for God's people. They had been taken captive by Assyria and Babylon, and the Lord promises rescue.

49:26 All flesh shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

51:11. The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness. Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

52:1 Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city!

The prophecies are talking about more than the Jewish return from exile and the rebuilding of their nation, the capital Jerusalem, and the Lord's great temple. These words talk about the eternal rescue of God's people, Jew and Gentile, who trust His promise of forgiveness and mercy in Christ! These great and beautiful chapters are a joy and comfort to read, reviewing again the position we have in Christ and the grandeur to come in heaven. However, lest we be like the farmer who has great crops every year, and thus is not so impressed with as bumper-crop, Isaiah under inspiration of the Lord weaves into these chapters the striking truths of how this rescue came to be, and what it cost. The rescue and salvation aren't due to any merit of God's people. It's from some other source.

Isaiah says, the source is the Lord's "Servant"; that is, our Savior, Jesus Christ. The word "servant" is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Sometimes it refers to slaves-- those who had been bought with money and became someone's possession. Sometimes it refers to messengers and ambassadors—Moses was a "servant" of God. Sometimes it was a term of humility and respect. When Eli realized that God was calling young Samuel, he told Samuel to say, "Speak, O Lord, your "servant" hears. Jesus came to earth to be the Lord's "servant" in every sense of the word—even the lowest sense. With all faithfulness to the Father, with all loyalty, with all willingness, He came to do the dirty-work, the dirtiest work--through false arrest, false trials and the cruel cross—work that no one else would do or could do. He was the "Servant." Perhaps you know someone of whom you would say, "That man, that woman, truly has a servant's heart." Jesus is the ultimate.

Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently. "Prudently"—with wisdom and with concern for the best possible outcome for the assignment at hand given by the master. The word translated "prudently" is the word used to describe how blind Jacob, when imparting his final blessings to his family, "skillfully" criss-crossed his hands so that his right hand would be upon the head of Ephraim Joseph's younger son for the greater blessing, and his left hand would be upon the head of Joseph's older son Manasseh. It is also the word used to describe the actions of David in Saul's army. David acted more "wisely" than any of the princes of King Saul. Jesus served with utmost prudence. His decisions and actions were not based on what would please Him for the moment, but what would please His Father for the mission on which He had been sent—saving sinners. When Jesus was tempted by Satan—to turn stones into bread, to jump from the temple pinnacle, to acquire luxury and power by bowing to Satan—He refused, He acted with prudence, heeding the will of the Father. How prudent were Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? How prudent are you when Satan brings temptations to satisfy immediately longings of heart, mind, and body? Does the short term benefit interest you, or the long term blessings? --- Jesus also acted with prudence when He approached and endured His last 24 hours. The hours would hardly be pleasant for him, yet in "prudence" He knew this was the way for saving sinners, who were dear to His Father and dear to Him. He went forward to suffer and die. How prudent are we when it comes to serving, helping, giving up of one's own time, energy, possessions, and self? We are not Jesus, are we? Father, forgive us for Jesus' sake.

Jesus' prudence, Jesus' skill, and wisdom, would bring success, He became Savior of the whole world. In our text says, *He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.* Such honor the Father extends to Him!—to be risen, to be lifted up, and to be powerful above all. We see those words fulfilled in His Resurrection on the third day, His Ascension to heaven on the 40th day, and His sitting at the right hand of power until the Last Day and beyond!

What a joy to have such a Rescuer from our captivity! But never forget what it cost Him. This was not just “another day at the ranch.” It cost Him dearly. *Many were astonished at you---so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.* In His mission, the Servant would undergo treatment fitting only the lowest of the low. His visage and His appearance were horrific. He was marred and disfigured, His appearance more ruined, than “any man.” In Isaiah 50, the Servant says, *I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard. I did not hide My face from shame and spitting (Isaiah 50:5-6).* What sort of picture does that bring to mind? Repulsive. *His form [was marred] more than the sons of men.* How do you suppose His form looked, as He was finally led to Golgatha, bearing His cross until He couldn't any more, and Simon of Cyrene was ordered to carry it for Him? Did He stand upright and strong, stepping firmly and powerfully ahead? Or was He stooped and struggling, with shuffling trembling legs and feet ahead? The latter. One thinks of a hero as having “No Quit” in him. But Jesus was empty. He had nothing left to go on. In His humiliation He willingly laid aside the use of His divine power and glory. The servant-mission cost Him a great deal. *Many were astonished at you.* The sight was so appalling it put people to silence, like a community that has been totally destroyed, there is not a sound. Dumbfounded, astounded, no word to be uttered, describes the reaction of those who would view Him. The Servant suffered for you.

However, the amazement goes beyond the shock of seeing what He physically endured. The amazement also includes the astonishing result! *So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.* The “sprinkling” phrase is difficult. It could be referring to the Old Testament practice of the high priest sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice, or the water of cleansing, ON someone for their purification, thus meaning that Jesus' mission was to sprinkle nations with atonement and forgiveness of sins. Or it could be saying that Jesus had crushed the forces of evil and now He would sprinkle-them-out, spattering-them-out, in total defeat. Either way, Jesus has won the victory to free captive sinners of the world, even you and me, from Satan, sin, death, and hell. We have the victory due to His love for us and due to His suffering God's wrath for us.

This result is likewise astounding! It is astounding enough to see Him so humiliated, mistreated, and disfigured. It is just as astonishing, if not more so, to see what He has accomplished—God's salvation for sinners. *So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.* The bold, proud, powerful, the wielders of earthly force, will be speechless to see how great Jesus is and how little they are. Their mouths will be closed in silence at the great victory Jesus has given us. Doesn't it take your breath away? “I'm safe, I'm free, I'm welcomed into almighty and all holy God's intimate family. I?! Unimaginable, unthinkable, unheard-of, never-before-seen!” That's what Christ has done for you. *For what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.* This is the Gospel message that Scripture proclaims and we proclaim! All a gift.

In Lent we see the astonishing devastation Jesus went through. We also see the astonishing release and freedom He has won for us. We praise God during Lent and always, for His Astounding, Prudent Servant!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---