

ISAIAH 53:1-3
THE CHOSEN SERVANT—UNDESIRABLE

From March 1, Isaiah 52:13-15

*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.*

For today, Isaiah 53:1-3

***Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground.
 He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.
 He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
 And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.***

In last week's study from Isaiah 52:13-15, Isaiah spoke of the Lord's special Servant, chosen and sent to set His people free from their helpless captivity. Isaiah was not speaking simply of Judah's captivity to Babylon, but of the sinner's captivity to 1) sin—rebellion against God, 2) death—God's punishment for sin, 3) hell—the ultimate degree of death, 4) the devil—his lies get us to sin in the first place. The Servant came to set us free. However, He did not carry out His rescue with outstanding glory. He was marred and disfigured more than any man, to the extent that people were speechless. So shocking it was. Nevertheless, when the Servant's victory was accomplished, He and His victory were so astonishing, that people again were speechless for the entirely opposite reason!

We continue the section, with what we call chapter 53 (the originals had no chapter and verse divisions). Isaiah here gives us a close-up view of the Servant's astounding lowliness and degradation. His purpose is to lead us to treasure all the more the Savior's astounding victory and our astounding and sorely needed rescue. Remember, it's like the farmer who has had meager harvests and even no crop, who is suddenly given a bin-bursting bumper crop! What a JOY! We look very closely at the Servant's lowliness, that we may rejoice and marvel all the more in His victory and our salvation!

Who has believed our report? Messengers of God, then and now, proclaim the glorious report of the chosen Christ's victory over sin for us. Yet what kind of reception does the message get? Those, who think they are something, have little use for it. Every time you sin, you think "you are something" and have little use for God. You consider your sin to be little, and His Servant the Savior to be little. John says about Jesus, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? The phrase "the arm of the Lord" refers to the Lord's strength in battle to free His people. It was not easy to wield a sword or weapon with a long flowing sleeve draped over the arm. To do battle, the arm was laid bare. Imagine the arm that the Lord laid bare! Intimidating! Many saw the Lord in action deliver His Old Testament people, but His power and His love did not lead them to repentance and to trust in Him as well. Although His arm was revealed, it was not really revealed—for them. What went in one eye went out the other. It's like hearing the Lenten message year after year, and thinking, "I know all this. Nothing new here"; and the message does not strike home—because of the stubbornness of heart.

Have you had a great announcement to make, such as engagement or the birth of a baby, only to have the listeners cast it off as insignificant, or not even believe it? "Father, forgive us for the times we ignore Your life-saving message, which the devil all too readily wants us to ignore and disregard." Surely the devil will let you hear the Passion History, the Lenten Message, and lead you to say, "What a shame." But he does not want you to hear it and to say, "Look what Christ in His love has done for me a sinner! He is My Savior!" Thus the revealed "arm of the Lord" is not revealed.

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. In outward fashion Jesus the Servant had no appeal. He grew up like a “tender plant” which can also be translated like a “suckling.” In the plant world, how desirable are sucklings? Have you had an apple tree, or other plant, which has little shoots come up from the base of the trunk? They’re called “suckers.” How desirable are they? All they do is suck the nourishment from the productive parts of the plant. Such suckers are cut off. Outwardly Jesus did not carry much desirability. Get rid of Him! He was like a root growing out of dry ground. How successful will a root-sprout be if it is growing out of dry ground? It’s sort of a joke, isn’t it? That’s how Jesus was received. “Might as well dig Him up and get rid of Him.” “Is not this Joseph the carpenter’s son?” “Can any good thing come from Nazareth?” In other words, “This fellow is nothing. He’s blocking our progress. He’s using up good space. Let’s get rid of Him.” Have you ever thought Jesus and His Word were a drag on your life? The devil is pleased when you give-way in just one little corner of life with one particular sin or one difference with God. And he won’t stop there.

He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. There is no physical description of Jesus in the Bible. There is no note of His extraordinary build or appearance. Remember how David’s son Absalom in the Old Testament was praised for his head of hair, that he cut but once a year? Remember how King Saul was noted for being a head taller than all the rest? No mention of any trait of Jesus is found. Likely very ordinary looking. However, in His suffering and death, His appearance was surely horrific. When Pilate had Jesus flogged, he brought Him out, and appealing to the crowd’s pity said, “Behold the man!” (In Latin, “Ecce homo.” Also a term used for Middle Ages paintings of Jesus in His passion.) Jesus was a sight to behold, not because of strength, but because of weakness.

He is despised and rejected by men. People were filled with contempt for Him. The enemies wanted to trample Him underfoot. Remember how Esau “despised” his birthright, considering the honored position in the family to be worth only a bowl of stew? Remember how God told the priest Eli that his family line would be cut off, because Eli had “despised” the Lord in the way he trained—did not train—his sons.? God charged King David with “despising” Him when he had Uriah murdered in battle and then with all appearance of righteousness took Bathsheba to be his wife. Jesus was so despised by His enemies. He was rejected--like a building being built. but then found lacking, and left incomplete and abandoned. Jesus was rejected by His own people in their little self-righteous world. Jesus was also rejected by the Romans. Even the Romans didn’t want Him. Do you? Or are you like the people of Gadara? Jesus drove the Legion of demons out of a man and allowed the demons to go into the herd of 2000 swine, all of which went berserk and charged off the cliff, drowning in the sea. The people of Gadara asked Jesus to “go away” ! If having Jesus means you have to part with things of this earth, do you reject Him?

A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Jesus knew pain. He knew bodily ailment and woe. He knew mental sorrow and distress. He was worn down, polished down, to nothing. I suppose we could compare Him to the worn down, bald tires on a vehicle. Miserable. Samson used the word for “grief” when he told Delilah to tie him with seven fresh leather thongs, to weave his hair into the loom, and finally to cut his hair, for then he would become “weak,” filled with grief, as any other man. Jesus was weak and oppressed. They nailed him to a cross to die, of man of sorrow and acquainted with grief.

And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. The disciples ran away in Gethsemane when He was arrested, Peter followed to the courtyard, but there he denied he even knew Him. John and the women were at the cross. But did they continued to hold to Him as their promised Savior? No one esteemed Him, no one meditated upon Him as the Rescuer from sin, no one accounted Him to be of any account anymore. How does it feel when someone disregards you and won’t look at you? How do you suppose a cripple feels when those walking by look the other way? The loyal friends of Jesus who witnessed His death and buried Him, were surely looking away and their hearts were veiled from the Truth. --- Do you sometimes veil your eyes, or ears, or hearts from God’s truth? When you are hurt, or angry, or disappointed, are you convinced God has dropped you? He has not! Jesus, the Servant who was counted un-desirable, is the one in Whom you are declared desirable! In Him you are not cast off by the Father, but enfolded into His arms. Through Christ, as Isaiah so beautifully says later, we are given “beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that you may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD—that He may be glorified!” (Isaiah 61:3).

The undesirable Lenten Servant is the most desirable treasure, your Savior!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---