

Date: 02/05/2012

Text: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Title: The Suffering Servant

Theme: We are healed because of the Messiah's suffering.

Introduction:

In the musical show "Annie", Daddy Warbucks said, "It doesn't matter who I run over when climbing the ladder of success, because I don't plan on coming back down."

There is much similarity between this line and what is happening in this year's primary elections. Several candidates are fighting for their lives, pouring whatever money they have in order to be the Republican candidate for the November elections. One candidate spent much of his \$55 million in negative advertisements attacking his opponents.

However, no matter how much you have spent, how hard you've worked, there is no guarantee what the outcome will be. Yet the only thing we are sure is that in this process of climbing up to the pinnacle of a political ladder, by the time the election is over, many will be hurt and relationships damaged.

Apart from politics, our world is full of broken and hurting people. We may be victims of those who are on their way to the top. We may be hurt by others' callous remarks and ridicule. We are wounded by their sinfulness or consequences of our own sins. Because of sins, our relationship with God is also ruined, being the ultimate wound we carry.

At the onset and the end of the passage we read, we are told that this coming Messiah will have that final victory. He will be lifted up and be worshipped by all. It's like telling you at the beginning of the campaign who is going to win. There is no suspense anymore. Moreover, it also tells us on his road to be lifted and honored; that this Messiah will bring healing to his people.

Today's passage is the last of the servant song and is also among the best known chapters of Isaiah. 52:13 to 53:12 should be taken as a unit. It begins and ends with the victory of the Servant Messiah, Jesus Christ. The suspense is what happens in between. The prophet Isaiah described in detail the journey this Messiah took to the high and honored position.

I. The Messiah suffered in obedience, we are healed.

First, there is obedience. Vs.13 tells us, "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.." To act wisely means acting in accordance to the most wise God. It is obedience to God. How did the Messiah become victorious? Through self-denying obedience to God.

Vs.14 also gives us a hint that this is a very different kind of obedience. By being obedient to God, this servant Messiah will shock and astonish people in two ways. First, his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind——." When people see him, their response will be: what, this is the Messiah, the son of God? There is no way this is true. It is a face marked by pain and suffering. The second aspect that people will be shocked is found in vs.15. That is, when one day His true worth is manifested, the nations will be so shocked that he is the Messiah. Then they would understand his teachings and proclamations.

Let's now take a look at some other features of this servant Messiah.

II. The messiah suffered in rejection. 1-3

53:1-3, "1 Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 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. 3 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.” He does not have features that would attract anybody. He does not have a halo on his head, or that handsome Middle East young man in many of the paintings we are familiar with. He would not win any beauty contest. The Samaritan woman did not recognize him as the Messiah. Even John the Baptist developed doubts about him. He was being looked down upon. If we were there, we would not want to hang out with him. This was rejection.

None of us like being rejected. We remember how we felt when we received a letter like this: We are very impressed by your experience as stated in your resume and application, but we are sorry to tell you..... this is rejection. We say that when you don't pay attention to me, or you don't listen when I talk to you, I feel rejected. Or I remember that particular afternoon; you turned your back to mom and mw, and walked out the door. I could never forget that rejection. Rejection hurts very much. No one wants to be rejected. Yet this Messiah, the creator of all, coming to his own people, he was rejected. It's like parents being rejected and forgotten by their children. It hurts very much. Yet this Messiah was totally rejected by his people and for a time, also, by those who had followed him for 3 years.

We are hurt and can be very angry when we feel rejected. In such moments, may we remember our Lord, our Messiah. If he, being the Son of God was rejected, as a student of his, how can we expect otherwise?

III. The Messiah suffered in redemption (atonement). 4-6

We probably have noticed that up till now, the prophet Isaiah used the pronoun you and he to describe this servant, suffering Messiah. But notice 4-6, “**4** Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. **5** 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. **6** All we 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.” Have you noticed how many times ‘we, us, our’ have occurred? Altogether 10 times in 3 verses. As we read these verses, we certainly recall Handel’s Messiah. It is telling us about the significance of his suffering in obedience and rejection. It was all for our sins. We were like sheep gone astray from the shepherd, the Messiah.

In a Chinese movie a doctor said, “to abort is to kill a life, to deliver is to welcome a life.” Yet she would keep performing abortions and delivering babies. Very often we know what is right and wrong, but just keep doing the wrong. We know it is wrong to desert our spouse and children for another person, yet we keep doing it. We know it is wrong to lie and steal, yet we keep perpetuating them all the time. We know it is wrong to replace God with wealthy, personal ambition and power, yet we can’t get out of the vicious cycle. We know it is wrong to hate those who have offended and hurt us, yet we don’t seem to be able to put an end to it. If we are honest with ourselves, we’ll admit that we have violated everyone one of the 10 commandments.

This section tells us that God placed all our sins on this Messiah. Our sins of admission and omission are all placed on Him. Because of our sins, he was whipped, he was despised and he was crucified on the cross. He suffered and received the punishment

that is due us. Because our sins and the punishment we deserve are all on him, we are forgiven and have been reconciled with God. God puts our sins on him, and place his righteousness on us so we can be considered righteous. For this reason, the Messiah's suffering is redemptive.

This theme of redemption is reflected and mirrored in numerous stories and movies, in both the East and West. In another 3 weeks, will be the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the so-called unsinkable Titanic. We are familiar with the fiction of the adulterous relationship between the two main characters. Yet there are many heroic acts on the night the ship sank. Titanic was full of wealthy passengers who indulged in self-absorbing pleasures. Yet on that terrible night, the men of self-absorption made the self-sacrificial choice. The powerful ones chose death so that the powerless, the women, the children and many maids, could get on to the lifeboats and were saved. Such and other stories in an unknowing way, reflect the Messiah, Christ's ultimate redemptive act.

IV. The Messiah suffered in Silence.

Furthermore in vs.7-9, “⁷ 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not 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. 8 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? 9 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.” Here it further tells us about his suffering. We notice that he suffered in silence. During his arrest and trial, there was the abuse and misuse of power. His case was passed on from local authorities to Roman governors; Pilate and Herod.

None of them dared to make any decisions, and wanted the other guy to be the bad guy. Yet, Jesus took all this in Silence. He had no higher human authority to appeal.

This is so different from human reasoning. We are familiar with the cash register justice. No more, no less, just right. We ring in a crime, and ring out a punishment. If there is a punishment, there must be a crime. There is no room for the suffering of the innocent.

Job in the midst of his suffering asked; what did I do wrong. While his friends tried to convince him of this cash register justice. You are suffering because you have sinned. Yet in God's economy, beyond our understanding, is this suffering of the innocent.

This is difficult, right? What happens when we feel that we have been mistreated? We want to air it out. We want to talk to someone to show how unfair it was. We want to let the whole world know that we are innocent. We want to appeal to a higher court. In airing out our frustrations and angry feelings, our words can be sharp and cutting, and even venomous. In such moments it behooves us to remember that God's principle is not of cash register justice. When the innocent suffered, he/she can remain silent. In God's kingdom economy, there is room for the suffering of the innocent.

V. The Messiah's journey from suffering to victory.

10-12, "**10** Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. **11** 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. **12** 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.” Having seen the Messiah suffered in obedience, suffered in rejection, suffered in atonement and suffered in silence, we have come a full circle to where we left off in vs. 13 of ch 52. He was crushed, grieved; now he will prosper. He will see his offspring, those that are considered as righteous. He will be vindicated. This servant of the lord, the Servant Messiah, is the one that will be lifted up.

Conclusion.

Daddy Warbucks in “Annie” said that when he climbed up that ladder of success, he didn’t care whom he ran over. This is also true with many climbing the political or corporate ladder of success. In order to end up first, they polish their image and put on their best. They attack their opponents with all the money they had. When misquoted or misunderstood, they would not silently lie down and eat the dust. No, they fight back with force.

This makes our study of the Messiah so refreshing and in a way so revolutionary. He had all the right to be treated like royalty, for there will come a day he will be lifted and be worshipped by people from all nations. Yet on his way to this position of honor and glory, he was ridiculed. His face was so marred that he scared people away. He was despised, rejected and eventually nailed on the cross. In the midst of such suffering he was obedient to his heavenly father, he did not fight back but suffered in silence. And on his way to glory, he would not run over us, but instead, took us into his presence and brought healing to us. This is so unlike the world we are in.

Beginning next Sunday, Christian churches around the world will enter into what the church calendar calls The Passion Week. It is Jesus' final week in Jerusalem. The week began with his joyous entry into Jerusalem and ended with his death on the cross. May it deeply impress upon us that this suffering Messiah is not just an example for me to follow in how to handle the trials and misfortunes in life. Instead, it is a constant reminder that all this suffering and pain was for you and me.