

# The Servant

M. W. Bassford

8-24-08

## Introduction.

- A. Ever since time began, most people have been engaged in a never-ending struggle for money, power, and influence, and sadly, an awful lot of leaders in the religious world use faith primarily as a tool to get those things. This has always been true. Back when the prophet Mohammed was still alive, he was no desert-dwelling ascetic. He had all the wives he wanted and the first pick of treasure from the towns his armies looted. Likewise, back when I lived in Houston, I lived near a major religious leader. On the outskirts of a major city, his house was set back so far from the road that you couldn't even see it, and, because he preached at two different churches in the city, he had a helicopter to carry him from church to church.
- B. Of course, not all who claim to be men of God behave like that, and the foremost who didn't was Jesus. Look at how He describes himself in Luke 22:27. This was no idle boast. Jesus didn't have a fancy mansion on the outskirts of Jerusalem. He didn't own a house at all. Jesus didn't accumulate a multitude of wives. Indeed, He never married even once. His purpose wasn't to get His. It was to get everybody else's.
- C. This verse, though, takes on a even more powerful meaning as we consider it in the context of the Lord's Supper. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, in about half an hour or so, we will take our metaphorical seat at the Lord's table itself. At that time, the men who have been designated will serve the Lord's Supper, but the true service to be rendered is not theirs. Even now, 2000 years after He spoke those words, the Lord Jesus is among us not as the One who is waited on, but as the One who serves, with a service that no one else has ever offered or ever could. Let's look this morning, then, at what Isaiah 53 tells us about the Servant.

## I. His Nature and Purpose.

- A. This text begins first of all by describing the **NATURE** of the Servant. This description appears in Isaiah 53:1-3. It is laced with irony, an irony that will continue throughout the entire context. Look at the rhetorical question in vs. 1. Who will believe what he's saying? Nobody. Who will understand what God is doing? Nobody. This is perhaps the strangest thing about the strange career of Jesus of Nazareth. The Jews had dozens of prophecies that told them that Jesus was going to suffer and then be glorified. They even had Jesus' own words warning them about what was going to happen to Him. Yet nobody got it. Not one single person expected Jesus to be crucified and then rise from the dead. Isaiah told them, but they didn't listen.
- B. Notice too how this passage describes the Servant Himself. He's not a majestic mountain. He's not a mighty oak. He's a little weed growing out of some worthless ground. Friends, I know exactly what that's like. I've finally finished filling in that swimming pool, but as I was doing that, in the exposed dirt, all kinds of scraggly little plants started poking up. Did I love them or cherish them? No. I ignored them, and when they interfered with my plans, I killed them. That's all Jesus was to the people around Him. As the passage says, there wasn't anything special to see about Him either. He was probably kind of scraggly-looking too, not even the kind of raw material that the important people would want to recruit into their armies. Just like I treated the weeds in my backyard, the important people ignored Him, and when He got inconvenient, they killed Him.
- C. The irony really continues in the next section of this passage. Even in this day and age, what happens when the prime minister of Great Britain, for instance, comes to visit the United States? Do we let him fly coach, and then catch a cab to his hotel once he arrives in the States? Of course not! There's all kinds of bands and ceremonies and speeches to let everybody know that THIS is an important guy and that we're really glad he's here. How much more, then, would we expect people to react to the one and only Son of God, visiting earth from heaven itself? We'd really roll out the red carpet for Him, right?
- D. Of course, that's not what happened. Jesus wasn't received with all kinds of flowery speeches. He was despised. He wasn't welcomed with open arms. He was rejected. He didn't have a luxurious, pleasant stay on earth. He didn't drink deeply of every earthly joy. Instead, it was grief He tasted, and the title He claimed was "Man of Sorrows." It reminds me of those scruffy guys who hang out at intersections around here looking for money. When they start walking the line of cars toward you, the last thing in the world you do is make eye contact, because if you do, you know he's going to come over and talk to you, and you DON'T want that. That's the way that the people of Jesus' time treated Him. He was the guy you don't make eye contact with.
- E. This becomes crueler when we consider the **PURPOSE** of the Servant. Isaiah discusses that in Isaiah 53:4-6. Why did Jesus go through such sorrow and grief on the cross? For the very people who were walking down the highway by the place where He was dying. For the very people who saw Him hanging there and figured He must have done something to deserve it. For the very people who wouldn't make eye contact. For us.
- F. In fact, brethren, it is our sin that quite causally put Jesus on the cross. He was there to die the death that we had earned. I've heard that hundreds of years ago, back during the time of the European kings, they had what were called whipping boys. When the little crown princes misbehaved, their tutors didn't spank them

directly because laying a hand on the royal person was a capital offense. Instead, they picked one of the crown prince's playmates, one of the servants' children, and beat the commoner so that the prince would feel bad about what he had done. The commoner hadn't done anything wrong, but he suffered for his prince's misbehavior. Jesus was the prince, and we are the commoners, but He became the whipping boy for all of us. The wounds on the head and the hands and the feet of Jesus were for us. The scourging that tore apart His back was for us. The mocking that He endured, the pain of the crucifixion, and His death were all for us, because we were the ones who had done wrong. Every punishment that we get to avoid, He suffered.

- G. Nor is it as though we had some good reason for doing the things that led to Jesus being punished so hideously. As this passage says, we strayed like sheep. We blundered into evil like big dumb farm animals who had no idea what we were doing. We foolishly incurred the sentence of death for ourselves because of the sin that we committed, but the penalty for our every iniquity was laid on Jesus. We sinned. He paid.

## II. His Death and Triumph.

- A. Nor was it inevitable that Jesus suffer in this way, as we see when we consider the circumstances of His **DEATH**. Isaiah records them prophetically in Isaiah 53:7-9. Notice first of all what this passage says about the silence of Jesus. Certainly, Jesus was nobody you'd look at twice, but that all changed once He opened His mouth. He spoke so eloquently that on one occasion, even the guards who had come to arrest Him were persuaded by Him. He had already proven that the Pharisees and the Sadducees were no match for Him, and these were the very people who were prosecuting Him. Jesus surely could have talked His way out of trouble if He'd wanted to. He could have made them look like fools and escaped once again. But for once in His life, He followed the Jewish leaders' script. He refused to speak in His own defense, and He was condemned for it.
- B. Of course, even with Jesus cooperating, the chief priests and scribes ran into a little problem. It's hard to convict an innocent man with a fair trial. They solved that problem by not having a fair trial. They ignored the fact that they couldn't find any reliable witnesses against Him and condemned Him simply for telling the truth about being the Son of God. Pilate wasn't on board with the Sanhedrin. He didn't even like them. But they knew how they were going to fix Pilate too. They threatened Him that unless He condemned Jesus, a man who had proclaimed Himself King, that they were going to tell Caesar that Pilate tolerated rebels. Pilate caved. He condemned a man he knew was innocent. Jesus offended the wrong people, and He died because of it.
- C. No doubt the Jewish leaders intended for the body of Jesus to be dumped on a garbage heap somewhere as the final sign of their hatred for Him, but that's not what happened. Instead, Joseph of Arimathea, one of the Sanhedrin who opposed the condemnation of Jesus, asked for and received the body of Jesus, and put it in his own tomb. He knew that Jesus was innocent, and this was the stand he could take. Jesus' sinless life didn't lead to earthly reward, but at least He had the cold comfort of being buried in a rich man's tomb.
- D. That would be a horrible story indeed, the kind of story that would leave a bad taste in your mouth, if the story ended there. However, Isaiah ends his vision of Jesus by describing the **TRIUMPH** of the Servant. This appears in Isaiah 53:10-12. Notice first of all who was behind this brutal tragedy. The Jewish leaders and Pilate may have been following their own desires, but they ended up fulfilling God's plan. Jesus' death was what His Father had intended from before the foundation of the world. However, because God is a just God, He could not allow such injustice to stand. Jesus, though dead would live again. Jesus, though childless, would receive a spiritual family, a family that could be joined together with God through Jesus' death.
- E. Even more than that, though, Jesus could and would intercede for those people because of the darkness of His earthly experiences. He learned what it was like to be tempted. He learned the pressure to not obey God when the price of obedience was death. He learned what it was like to fear death, and He learned what it was like to die. Even though He was God, Jesus experienced something that God had never experienced before. It filled Him not with loathing for all the poor dumb sinful mortals, but with compassion for them and for their trials. To this day, He stands ready to justify them forever, and He can, because He died in their place.
- F. Nor have Jesus' accomplishments gone unrecognized. Look what God promises in this very last verse. This ending to the story is not a typical one. Usually, when people die as victims of casual injustice, they just rot in obscurity. Not so with Jesus. Instead, the name of the Galilean carpenter, this Jewish peasant, has become the most famous name in the entire world. We live thousands of years after Jesus' time on earth, we live on the other side of the world from where Jesus walked, but when was the last time you met somebody who hadn't heard of Jesus? When the great men of history are ranked, Jesus' name stands at the very top. The only reason we even know the names of men like Pilate and Caiaphas is because they appear in His story.
- G. Likewise, since the time of His death, Jesus has gained power and dominion beyond what anyone else has ever known. Every single earthly government in existence then has since been overthrown, but the heavenly kingdom headed by Jesus continues and flourishes. The rule of Jesus will last until the end of time, and then, He will surrender it willingly to the Father who elevated Him in the first place. All of this came about because Jesus was willing to die to please God and save us from our transgression, and it continues with the intercession of Jesus protecting us until we need no more protection in the eternal safety of heaven.

**Conclusion.** If you want to serve this Servant, come to Him today.