

The Promised Savior Accomplishes Our Peace

Advent Sermon Series on Isaiah's Servant Songs

Luke 2:25-32; Isaiah 52:13-53:5

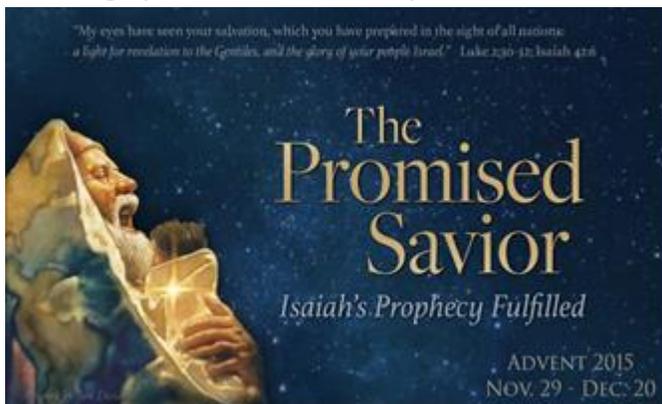
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

December 20, 2015

TEXTS: Luke 2:25-32; Isaiah 52:13-53:5

The season of Advent helps us to prepare our hearts for the birth of Christ. The four weeks leading up to Christmas anticipate the arrival of our promised Savior who brings hope, love, joy,



and peace to all who trust in Him. This Advent season at Kenwood, we have been looking together at God's promise that He made to His people through the prophet Isaiah. Central to Isaiah's prophecy is the figure of the Servant of the Lord who is described in four beautiful poems. Some of the most beautiful poetry in the entire Bible are in Isaiah 42, 49, 50 and 53. The

promise of the Servant of the Lord is of a coming Savior who will be the hope of Israel, has been prepared by the Father's love, whose life is marked by a joyful obedience, and whose coming accomplishes our peace. That is our subject this morning, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, Christmas Sunday. The candle of peace has been lit, and we consider this morning from the Word of God the coming of Christ into the world to accomplish peace on our behalf. We have been looking through the eyes of Simeon, this elderly believer that Luke presents before us. I imagine him as someone that I would love to be related to. In fact, isn't it great that in Christ, we have relatives like this? We have a huge family of faith. Hebrews tells us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and Simeon is part of that cloud.

Simeon is given a revelation by God, by the Holy Spirit, that he is going to see the Lord's salvation. The Spirit of God promised him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and it is this scene, that riveting scene for us, of the first Christmas. Simeon's hope for the consolation of Israel is a deep connection with the counsel of Scripture. It is the hope that God gave to His people that after the exile, He would act again. God would act, and this engenders hope for His people. God would comfort those who mourn by His love; He would provide forgiveness for us and give everlasting joy; and His salvation would shine forth and radiate peace to all nations. This is the hope unique to the

Scriptures. We hear it in Isaiah 40:1-2:

“Comfort, comfort My people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double [full recompense] for all her sins.”

We have been looking the last several weeks at each Servant Song. In the first Servant Song, Isaiah 42, we saw the Servant promised as the hope of Israel. We saw in Isaiah 49 that the Servant was prepared for a sacred mission, prepared in the womb by the Father's love. We saw last Sunday, in Isaiah 50, that the Servant's life is characterized by a joyful and complete obedience to God. This morning, we turn to look at the Servant's mission carried out in the moving description of the fourth and longest of the Servant Songs: Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 is like the Swiss Alps. It is one of the high points in the entire counsel of the Lord. The chapter divisions of the Bible were not added until the medieval period, and sometimes the chapter breaks are slightly off. Stephen Langton put the chapter breaks in while he was riding on horseback to Paris, so we should be gracious. The fourth Servant Song actually begins in Isaiah 52:13 and goes all the way through to the end of chapter 53. It is in this portion, this fourth Servant Song, that we find out why Christmas must be celebrated for millennia. We find out the meaning of Christmas, the meaning of peace on earth, that peace is something that is accomplished, achieved, gained, won, by the offering of the Servant for your sins and mine. This is sacred ground, and we want to look carefully at this precious passage and see how it comes to fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Keep your Bible open to Isaiah 53. Beginning in Isaiah 52:13, the Servant is introduced, identified. The Lord is the speaker:

“Behold, My Servant shall act wisely; He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.”

The Servant is said to act wisely, with insight. The term used here in verse 13 is the term in Hebrew for the Renaissance, a term of wisdom, a term of understanding of God's will faithfully carried out. The Servant acts not only with wisdom, but right at the beginning of the song the Servant is said to be exalted, He is high; He is lifted up; He is exalted above all. The Servant of the Lord is set at the pinnacle of our affections in the very first stanza of the poem. So too at the very end, in Isaiah 53, the Servant is exalted. The song begins with exultation; it ends with exultation, and yet the reason for His exultation is described throughout the movement of the poem. The Servant's exultation, as the poem begins to unfold, seems surprising. In Isaiah 52:14, we see that though the Servant is exalted, many people are astonished at Him. We read:

“As many were astonished at You—His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the children of mankind;. . .”

This is a surprising move in the poem. Though the Servant is said to receive our adoration, He is exalted above all, when we look at the Servant, His figure is marred. Yet, we read in Isaiah 52:15 the reason for this marring:

“ . . . so shall He sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of Him;”

There is a stunned silence among the nations at the Servant of the Lord. The phrase in Isaiah 52:15 is a crucial one for us to understand: the mission of the Servant. The Servant comes to sprinkle the nations. As I looked at this closely this week, I burst into tears as I looked at the description of the Servant's task. What is the sprinkling that the Servant accomplishes? The language that used here of the Servant is the language that is used in Leviticus to describe the application of the offering for the sin of God's people. The Servant of the Lord sprinkles the nations. In Leviticus 4, when God's people sin unintentionally, when they sin and do things that ought not to be done, there is a provision made for forgiveness, and that provision is made through substitutionary atonement. An animal is offered in behalf of the sinner. The priest takes the animal that is dedicated to God, slaughters it, takes some of the blood and brings it to the Tent of Meeting. In Leviticus 4:6, we see this key term: the priest dips his finger in the blood and the Servant of Lord Himself sprinkles the nations. Blood atonement is made, and it is blood atonement for you and for me that causes the nations to close their mouths in speechless wonder. Christmas has a sacred silence at its heart, for when we see the work of a Servant promised and fulfilled, we are amazed. Isaiah says that to see this and understand it requires faith. He asks the question in Isaiah 53:1:

“Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

The mission of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 requires faith to see its grandeur. In Isaiah 53:2a we read that the Servant comes in apparent insignificance and weakness:

“For He grew up before Him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground;

In Isaiah 53:2b, we read:

“He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him.”

There is weakness in the Servant's arrival, in His advent. There is no physical beauty that would draw our attention to Him. Becoming Servant does not grab our attention; He does not compete for it. It is possible to miss the Servant, and in fact, those who see Him consider Him of slight regard. The Servant is despised; He is rejected. We read that He is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief or suffering. Many today are inclined to pass by Christmas, to move past the manger, as though these are not the greatest events that humanity has ever seen. In Isaiah 53:3, we read about the Servant:

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; You will be inclined to scorn and reject Him and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

Humanity regards the Servant as of slight regard, and yet Isaiah tells us that the Servant surely has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows. The Servant has a mission—to carry the sin of humanity, and yet humanity sees Him and regards Him not, sees Him stricken, afflicted by God, Yet, Isaiah describes that the mission of the Servant is to be wounded for **our** transgressions, crushed for **our** iniquities.

Isaiah tells us that the chastisement that brings peace—here's the crucial term—that brings **us** peace is upon Him. The Servant of the Lord comes into this world to carry the sin of humanity. He is the hope of Israel; He is prepared in the Father's love; His life is characterized by joyful obedience; and the Servant's arrival in this world accomplishes peace. He does not just declare it; He achieves it. The Servant of the Lord carries the day by bearing the punishment that we deserve. The Servant's stripes or wounds bring about healing for us. As the poetry of Isaiah 53 continues to unfold, Isaiah predicts this narrative, 700 years before the arrival of Christ. Look at it in the text. Not only does the Servant come in weakness; not only is He disregarded. We read in Isaiah 53:7 about the Servant who is tried and speaks no word in His defense:

“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.”

The Servant is judged in Isaiah 53:8:

“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?”

The Servant is executed, and we read in Isaiah 53:9:

“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.”

The Servant is buried with the wicked and with the rich man in His death although he was innocent. Yet, we read in Isaiah 53:10, as the poem unfolds, that the Servant's suffering, His dying, His wrongful accusation, was nothing less than the will of God:

“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.”

The Servant has made His life an offering for guilt; His life is offered like the offerings in Leviticus. His life is presented. His offering is received, and we read in Isaiah 53:10-11 that on

the other side of this accomplishment of peace, the Servant is raised from the dead.

“After He has made His life and offering for guilt, He will see His offspring and prolong His days, and out of the anguish of His soul, He will be satisfied.”

Once the Servant is raised from the dead, He will do this extraordinary thing, Isaiah 53:11:

“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.”

He will make many to be righteous. By His shed blood, He will justify the many.

In the end, the concluding scene of this majestic poem, we see that the Servant who justifies the nations receives a portion with the great and is exalted. Isaiah's promise of Isaiah 53, his description of the ministry of the Servant of the Lord and His accomplishment of peace is the fuel for our hope, our love, our joy, and our peace this Christmas. It is the promise of His coming, His advent, to which Simeon rejoices in the scene of Luke 2. When He sees the Infant Jesus come into the temple, Simeon says in Luke 2:29-32:

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel.”

The overwhelming conviction of the New Testament is that Isaiah's promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, born of Mary, grew to manhood, carried our sins of sickness and rebellion on the cross, where He suffers a shameful death that atones for sin and ends the war between mankind and God. Isaiah 53 is quoted or alluded to more than 35 times in the New Testament. It is the greatest passage cited of all.

Jesus echoes this language in the Upper Room in Matthew 20:28 where He says:

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Paul describes the work of the Servant in 2 Corinthians 5:21 when he says:

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Ephesians 5:2 says:

“Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

Hebrews 10:10 says:

“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

We read in 1 Peter 2:24:

“He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.”

Isaiah 53 is overwhelming. It points so vividly, so clearly, so dramatically, in such specific detail to the coming of Jesus that we might rightly ask: How can anyone not believe this? Is it possible to read this passage written 700 years before its fulfillment and not see that this points directly to the incarnation, birth, life, perfect obedience, suffering death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Whenever I read Isaiah 53 or discuss it with others, I am often asked the question: “How can anyone not see this?” Sometimes people come in a little closer, like the time when I went golfing with a rabbi in training. We got to the golf club, unloaded our clothes from the trunk of the car, and a man came up to us. Seeing us struggling to get our clubs out, he said, “Let me get those.” He put our clubs in the cart, and he recognized somehow that my friend was Jewish. He put my clubs in the back of the club cart, but before he had even cinched the strap, he turned to my friend, and with no introduction he just said, “What do you make of Isaiah 53?” I thought that was a little insensitive, actually. No transition? My Jewish friend stumbled a little, and he said, “Well, some people interpret it this way; some that way.” It was obvious he wasn’t ready to engage. It begs the question, though, doesn’t it? How can anyone read this passage and not see the direction to which it points? Why don't all Jews recognize the arrival of Jesus Christ in fulfillment of Isaiah's great promise?

My first response to this question is to remind us that many Jews did receive Him, and many continue to do so today. Twenty-five percent of the city of Jerusalem responds with belief to the earliest Christian preaching. All of the authors of the New Testament except Luke are Jews who said: “He is the promised One.” Many continue to respond in faith to Him today, like Mitch Glaser, who grew up in a nominal Orthodox Jewish family. Through reading the Scripture, he came to see that Jesus is the hope of Israel, for He is the promised One. In his zeal and exuberance upon receiving Jesus as Messiah and Savior, he came back to his family. He thought: “I’ll just read Isaiah 53 to my whole family, and they will all believe.” He tells the story himself. He says:

“I returned to my home in New Jersey months after receiving Christ, on fire for the Lord Jesus. I explained my decision to receive Christ to my parents, with no small amount of dread, and their response was as bad as I had feared. Although they disagreed on whom to blame for my decision, they agreed that I had to leave the home. They informed me that I

was not permitted to speak to my grandparents, my neighbors, or my sisters about my belief in Jesus. My mother also prohibited bringing crosses into the house, going to church, and reading the New Testament.

“That memorable evening—supposed to be my last night in my home, I asked my mother if I could show her why I believed that Jesus was the Messiah. I read her Isaiah 53, fully expecting her to see the prophet’s reference to Jesus. I expected that she would repent and accept Jesus as her Messiah, leading the way for the conversion for the whole entire rest of my family. Instead, by the time I reached verse seven, my mother had fallen asleep. I woke her up and asked her if I could keep reading. She nodded in a sleepy stupor, and I finished the passage. I asked her, ‘So what do you think?’ She said to me, ‘I told you not to read the New Testament to me.’

“Though that might seem like a strange statement, it is not. Most Jewish people are unfamiliar with the Bible, even those who are familiar the Torah are unfamiliar with Isaiah and find it foreign.

“I said, ‘Mom, that’s our Bible. Isaiah is a Jewish prophet.’ Her response was, ‘I don't care. Don't ever bring this up to me again.’”

Why don't most Jews believe? It is actually the same reason why most of the rest of the world doesn't believe. The reason why we don't believe is that we are unfamiliar with this glorious passage. If we left Kenwood Baptist Church this morning and each of us interviewed 10 people on the street and asked them: “Are you familiar with the detailed prophecy that predicts the arrival of Christ in weakness; that He would be tried and executed though He had done no wrong; that He would be wrongfully condemned; that He would be buried; that He would rise from the dead and with His shed blood offer you forgiveness, do know that?” Most people of those 10, I imagine, would say: “I have no idea what you are talking about.” People are unfamiliar with this particular passage. People do not understand or believe that God can promise 700 years beforehand what He intends to do. Do you believe that? Most people around us do not understand or believe in the power of sin. Most people do not understand or believe in blood atonement. Most people do not understand or believe that God could take on human flesh and offer Himself for sin. Most people do not understand or believe in the bodily resurrection from the dead. Perhaps most decisive of all, most people have never met or interacted with someone who could explain these things and who lives in such a way that demonstrates their reality. Why do most Jews not believe? The same reason that most of the rest of the world doesn't believe.

Simeon himself, after this burst of praise that he had seen God’s salvation in Christ, turns to Jesus’ own parents. Joseph and Mary marvel at what Simeon had said about this infant Redeemer and King. Simeon blessed them, and then he turned to Mary, and he said in Luke

2:34:

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also).”

Every one of us, no matter what our ethnicity, must respond to Christmas, must respond to the clarity of Isaiah 53. We must respond. Is there a God out there who not only knows the future, but has planned it and is bringing it about?” Each of us must decide: “Do I believe that what is fundamentally wrong in the universe is my sin, my war against my heavenly Father?” Each of us must decide: “Do I believe in the possibility that I could be forgiven?” Some of us think that what we've done is beyond forgiveness, and we think God's hand, God's arm, is too short to save us. Each of us must decide: “Can God, who made humanity in His image and likeness, actually lay aside His heavenly glory and take on human flesh?” Each of us must decide: “Not only can God take on human flesh, but can He live a life in perfect obedience and offer that flesh for your redemption and mine?” Do we believe in the resurrection of the dead? Do we believe that He has called each of us, not only to understand and believe, but to be His ambassadors of this great news in the world? Mitch Glaser knew that to receive Christ meant that Christ should be shared, and he went to his family longing that each of them would know Christ. He spent the last several decades of his life sharing Christ.

It is my longing that there would be no one here this morning outside of Christ's peace. The only requirement is to believe and receive this promise, accept God's diagnosis of our condition, and receive His remedy in Jesus Christ.

For those of us who know Christ, then Isaiah 53, its fulfillment in the Gospels, presents a challenge to us. It is a challenge to us that the more deeply we understand the Scriptures that Jesus used, the closer we come to understanding the heart of Jesus, and the more we have a clear understanding of our own mission in light of His. Christmas doesn't make us passive. The peace of God accomplished on our behalf makes us active, and this spirit of servanthood, written into the prophetic vision of the Servant of the Lord, lived out in the ministry of Jesus, becomes the motive and the method of all Christian living. “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.” Jesus told His disciples in Luke 22:25-27:

“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. . . Behold, I am among you as the One who serves.”

Paul says in Romans 15:8-9:

“For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in

order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.”

If you know Christ, if you have received His peace, I want to challenge you to drink deeply of this spirit of servanthood and weave it into your life this Christmas. Serve those around you. Share your Christmas table with someone who has no place to go. Serve the vulnerable in imitation of Christ. Open up your heart to continue the Servant's mission in the world today, sharing Him, asking those around you if they know Him. Be ready to explain the truths of Scripture and to model the truths of Scripture in how you live and conduct yourself. Philippians 2:5-11:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Merry Christmas: Jesus Christ has come. Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, We exalt You this morning. We join in the imagery of Isaiah 53 that You are exalted, that You rightly deserve the highest place, for You have carried out the will and mission of God. Lord Jesus, we sing this morning of love incarnate, love divine, the Savior born for us. Lord Jesus, we exalt You because You came not only to this world, You came to suffer and die on our behalf. Lord, we know You, who You are in truth, by Your resurrection from the dead, and we proclaim You this morning. Father, I pray if there are any here this morning standing on the outside of the peace of Christmas, I invite them now to open their heart to Jesus Christ, simply to say, “Lord Jesus, I confess my need for You. Would You take my sin, wash it away by the sprinkling of Your blood? Bring me inside the peace that You have accomplished for me.” Lord Jesus, I pray for every one of us who does know Jesus Christ, that our lives that are celebrating this week, that our giving would be more than our receiving, and that we would embody in our own life in context the spirit of servanthood that You, Jesus, have set before us as a Lordly example. We love You this morning, Lord Jesus. It is a Merry Christmas Sunday. There is peace between God and man, a peace that You have accomplished for us. Hallelujah! Amen.