



This Sunday we continued in our substitution series. If Isaiah 40 onwards is a crescendo, chapter 53 is the pinnacle, as we finally see how the arm of the LORD will be revealed and how salvation for the whole world will be achieved (52v10, 53v1) through the LORD's servant. But what Isaiah goes on to describe is far from what we would expect:

1 – See the servant suffering (53v2-3)

The servant arrived not fully formed; he had to grow. And he didn't grow into someone who was particularly easy on the eye in physical terms; he looked normal. The servant was hated, Isaiah goes on to tell us. Shockingly, he was hated by *us*, we learn at the end of v3.

2 – See the servant stricken (53v4-6)

Isaiah uses 12 words in this passage to describe the servant's suffering. It is a grim picture he paints. But this is not the sorry tale of a wicked man finally getting his comeuppance. The servant suffered for us. He suffered because of us. Isaiah emphasises it again and again. He gives us 3 different pictures of sin to help us see our guilt: transgression (rebellion), iniquity (perversion) and wandering away. The servant suffered because of our sin, and he paid it all.

3 – See the servant silenced (53v7-9)

Like a sheep, the servant went silently to his slaughter. But he wasn't silent because he was too stupid to know what was happening or because he was powerless to resist it. The servant *chose* to go silently. Humans who have chosen to sin, as we all have, need a substitute who could choose to live a perfect life and give himself up for us.

4 – See the servant satisfied (53v10-12)

We read in v10 that it was God's will that his servant be crushed. This was God's plan because it was the only way a sinful people could be saved. But the crushing is not the end of the story. In v10 the passage shifts from past into present and then into future tense. The servant will live. He will win. He will see that he has succeeded in his salvific mission and he will be crowned conqueror.

Who is this servant? Who else could possibly fulfil these ancient words more closely? It is Jesus. How incredible that God's own son would be the servant God would crush. And how incredible that he would see life by rising again.

How are we to respond? The Ethiopian in Acts 8 demonstrates the model response. We are to call on the name of Christ, if we have not already, and be baptised. There may be some among us who are not yet sure whether they believe. There may be others among us who know that they believe but have not yet responded to Christ's call to be baptised. For the majority of us, like the Ethiopian in v39, we are to go on our way rejoicing in our extraordinary saviour and what he has done for us.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group or for personal reflection...

1. What do you know of the prophecy of Isaiah and how this passage fits in?
2. What most impacts you in the description of the servant's suffering?
3. How do we see different elements of this passage fulfilled in Christ's life?
4. Why is it so important that the servant was silent?
5. How does our substitution motif develop at this point?
→ What significant new element(s) does this passage add?
6. Why not spend some time as a group telling your baptism stories to each other?
7. What will it look like for you to go on your way rejoicing (Acts 8v39) this Easter?

