

The Mission

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening for a short while, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, Isaiah 52, Isaiah chapter 52, and if we read again at verse 13, Isaiah 52 at verse 13, behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind. So shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see and that which they have not heard, they understand, and so on.

There are many people, and whether they're good at it or not, they love to sing. They love to sing. Maybe you love to sing. Maybe you love to sing in the shower or in the bath or in the bedroom or in the car or in the kitchen, and I'm sure you love to sing when you're in church. And even though people think, sometimes they think that they can't sing, they're not very good at singing, the Bible calls us and the Bible commands us, as you know, to make a joyful noise to the Lord. That's what we're singing in Psalm 89. The psalmist encouraged us to sing about God's mercy and God's faithfulness. God's mercies, I will ever sing, and with my mouth I shall thy faithfulness make to be known to generations all. And so it's good to sing, even if we're not good at singing. It's good to sing. In fact, it's actually scientifically proven that it's good for you to sing. It's good for you to sing. It's good for your mental health. It's good for your mood to sing, because singing, as you know, it's uplifting. It's encouraging, and it puts you in a good mood. Because the thing is, you always know someone is in a good mood because they're singing. I always know how that Calamian, our postman, is in a good mood, because he's always singing or whistling as he drops off the mail every day. And for the most part, we like to sing good songs or uplifting songs with catchy tunes. But you know, when we come to this passage, this is the song of the suffering Savior. This is the song of the suffering Savior. And it's not a song with uplifting lyrics and a catchy tune, because it's actually a very solemn song.

It's a very serious song. It's a very sorrowful song. It's a suffering song. It's the song of the suffering Savior. And it's all about, as you can see and as you know, it's all about his humiliation, rejection, rejection, suffering, death, and burial. And as we come to this communion season, I want us to sing this song. I want us to sing this song, not audibly, but I want us to sing this song with adoration, with appreciation, with admiration of our suffering Savior. I want us to sing this song, the song of the suffering Savior. And over this communion season, I want us to break this song down into three sections. There are three sections that we'll look at in this song. So there's the mission, the message, and the many. The mission, the message, and the many. We'll consider the mission this evening, the message tomorrow morning, and God willing, tomorrow evening, we'll look at the many. And so this evening we're looking at the mission. That's in verses 13 to 15 of Isaiah 52. The mission. And we can think about the mission under more alliteration for you. Three headings. His action, his appearance, and his atonement. His action, his appearance, and his atonement. So first of all, we see in the mission, we see his action. His action, verse 13. Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted.

[4 : 36] Now, as you know, this section in the Old Testament, which presents and portrays to us the song of the suffering Savior, it has often been described by the Jews as the forbidden chapter. And it's described as the forbidden chapter because, well, as you know, it's one of the clearest and clearest Old Testament prophecies about the identity of Jesus as the Savior of sinners. For centuries, the song of the suffering Savior, it has created many discussions and debates and disagreements among rabbis to the point that rabbis decided to remove the song of the suffering servant from all their synagogue readings.

Where on each Sabbath, when the congregation of Jewish believers, when they would gather together in the synagogue for worship, they would follow what's known as the haftara. The haftara, which is, it's a set of portions of Scripture based on the prophets. And they would either read the haftara or chant the haftara in the synagogue. But when the haftara portion would be read in the synagogue, when it would come to this section, so they would read one week, they would read from Isaiah chapter 51 all the way through into Isaiah 52, and then they would stop at verse 12. Then the following haftara, reading the following week, the following Sabbath, the portion that they would read would begin in Isaiah 54. So they would completely miss out the song of the suffering Savior. They would completely miss out this well-known passage. And sadly today, Jewish people, they don't know this song. They don't know who it's about because they're either ignorant to it, or they think it's irrelevant, or they just are completely indifferent towards this song. And yet, as we know, it's one of the clearest Old Testament prophecies about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It's the song of the suffering Savior.

But it's not the only song in Isaiah. There are many songs in the book of Isaiah. There are four servant songs in the book of Isaiah. And this is the fourth and final servant song in the book of Isaiah.

It's the song of the suffering Savior. And as you can see, this song, it begins in Isaiah 52, all the way through to the end of chapter 53. To us, it might seem quite untidy to start a song halfway through a chapter. But we always have to remember, every time we come to the Bible, that there were no verses when the Bible was first written in Hebrew or in Greek. There were no verses.

There were no chapter divisions. There were no chapter divisions when Isaiah first penned these words 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. And so we look at these verses. And when we come to the opening word, as it is, of this song, it actually sets the scene for the whole song. Because the first word we see there, verse 13, behold. What a great word to begin a song with. Behold. Do you know the word behold? It's calling us to do something? But it's asking us to do something more than just look, or look closely. The word behold is actually saying to us, stop and look at this. Stop and love this.

[8 : 07] Stop and meditate on this. Stop and marvel at this. Behold. And so even over this communion season, that's where we've been told right from the outset, stop. You've had a busy day. You've had a busy week.

There's a lot going on, maybe at home or in the family. But the Bible says, stop. Stop and look at this. Stop and love this. Stop and meditate on this. Stop and marvel at this song. Behold. And as you know, that's what John the Baptist said. That's what John the Baptist said when he first saw Jesus. His first words were, you follow John's finger. And he's saying, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's what John was saying. John was saying to everyone around him, stop and look at him. Stop and love him. Stop and meditate on him. Stop and marvel at him. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And here is Isaiah, right in the Old Testament, hidden in the pages of Scripture. Here is Isaiah, and he writes, behold, my servant shall act wisely.

He shall be high and lifted up, and he shall be exalted. And you know, what we're being told here is that the mission of the Messiah, the mission of the Savior, the mission to save lost and hell-deserving sinners, that mission, that mission started with God's servant, as we're told there, who was high and lifted up. He was in a place and in a position of exaltation. The mission started with God's servant, who was in a position and place of exaltation. He was high and lifted up. And you know, thinking about it, it almost seems like a contradiction of terms to say that a servant is high and lifted up. Because you don't usually describe a servant in such a position. You don't usually say that a servant is high and lifted up or in a position of exaltation. In our minds, a servant is always down there.

They're in a low position or a place of humility. But what's remarkable is that when this someone, when someone is in a high position and a place of exaltation, when they're anointed, when they're anointed, they're anointed for service.

[10 : 45] When they're anointed from that high position, they're anointed for service. And you know, we've all seen this. We all saw it this year. You remember earlier this year when the world was watching and all the world was witnessing the coronation of King Charles. And I'm sure you watched it. There hadn't been a coronation for over 70 years. So we all sat and watched it. But there was a point during the coronation ceremony when King Charles had to remove his royal robe

and take off his ring. And it was all for one purpose, to be anointed. But when King Charles was anointed, if you watched it, when King Charles was anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, he was to be anointed behind screens. There were all these special screens that were put in place. And he had to be anointed behind screens out of the sight of the public eye. Because the anointing, the whole purpose of the anointing, was that King Charles was to be alone before God. He was to be anointed in the presence of God. That was the whole purpose of the screens. And then after the anointing, that's when

King Charles was then crowned king. And he was set apart as a servant king. Which means although that, although King Charles is our sovereign, we all acknowledge that he's our sovereign. But he's also our servant. Although he's our sovereign, he is also our servant. And you know, that's the image, that's the illustration we're being given here, that the mission started. The mission of salvation started with God's servant in a position and place of exaltation. He's sovereign, absolutely 100% sovereign. But he was anointed to be our servant. He was Christed. That's what the word anointed means.

It means Christed. Therefore, he's our sovereign. But he's also been set apart as our servant. He's been Christed as our servant. He's our servant king. And he's our servant king, we're told there, verse 13. He's a servant king who acts wisely. Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He's a servant king who acts wisely. And that phrase, acts wisely, it refers to a wise action, a wise plan, a wise strategy to redeem lost sinners. And you know, like it was for King Charles, whose anointing was behind those screens, out of the sight of people, this anointing, this Christing, this wise plan of God. It was formed and fashioned and formulated out of the public eye in the realms of eternity. Because you know, what we've been shown here at the outset of the song of the suffering Savior is that the mission of this Messiah, the mission of salvation, the mission to save hell-deserving sinners like you and me, it all started with the covenant of redemption. That's where it always starts. It started with the covenant of redemption. Do you know, my friend, in order for the mission of salvation to take place, there was a plan. There was a plan of salvation. And that plan of salvation, as you know, it began in eternity. It wasn't a plan that was scrambled and scraped together after the shock of Adam and Eve falling into sin in the garden of Eden. No, this wise action, this wise plan, this covenant of redemption, it was promised. It was all procured. It was all put in place before God allowed man to walk in the garden. This was all put in place before God even spoke into the darkness and said, let there be light. It all started with the covenant of redemption. And you know, that's what Paul reminds us, is it not? Paul says that God the Father chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Just think about that. God the Father chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. And in love, says Paul, in love He predestined us for adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace.

[15 : 33] You know, you should read those verses and it should blow your mind. God was thinking of you in eternity, before the world existed, before He had created even the smallest atom.

He was thinking about you and your precious soul. It should blow your mind. My friend, the mission of salvation started with God's servant and His wise action.

His wise action. But the mission of salvation, it was revealed by His appearance. That's what we see secondly. His appearance. So His action and then His appearance.

He says, Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you, His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and His form beyond that of the children of mankind.

You know, whenever I think about the covenant of redemption, I always find it a fascinating topic. But whenever I think about it, I get excited. I think it's amazing.

[16 : 47] It reminds me and it reassures me as a Christian, first and foremost, as a Christian, that God always had a plan. He still has a plan.

We might look at the world tonight and think it's in absolute chaos, but it's all part of the plan. It's a perfect plan of salvation. And it's a wise plan of salvation. And it all began in eternity.

It all began before the foundation of the world. And the wise action in this covenant of redemption was that our sovereign who is high and lifted up, our sovereign who was in a position and place of exaltation in glory, our sovereign became our servant.

Our king was Christed to be our savior. He was anointed to be our savior. And whenever I think about that, I get excited.

You should get excited too because it's amazing that you and I are saved at all. But you know, when I get excited, I was thinking about the covenant of redemption.

[17 : 50] It always reminds me of that creative conversation that the Puritan, John Flavel, imagined in his mind, that conversation between God the Father and God the Son.

And I know I've mentioned it to you before and I'll keep mentioning it to you because I just love it. I love what John Flavel wrote. If you've never read it for yourself, read it.

Find it. Read it. Because it really captures and creates in our minds the depths that our triune God went to in order to save us.

The depths that he had to go to in order to redeem us. And John Flavel, he creates this beautiful conversation that took place in the realms of eternity before the world began.

And it's all behind the screens. It's all behind the scenes. All out of sight from public eye. Where God the Father is speaking to God the Son. And John Flavel, he writes, he says, My son, my son, here is a poor company of miserable souls.

[18 : 57] That's what we are. Miserable souls who have utterly undone themselves and now lie open to my justice. What shall be done for these souls? Asks the Father. And the Son responds and he says, Oh my Father, such is my love for them and my pity of them.

That rather than they perish, I will be responsible for them. Bring me your bills, Father. Bring me your bills that I may see what they owe you. Upon me, my Father.

Upon me, says the Son, be all their debt. And the Father says, But my son, if you undertake for them, you must pay the last penny. The last penny.

Expect no discounts. If I spare them, I will not spare you. And the Son replies, it's a beautiful response, I am willing, Father. I am willing.

Let it be so. Charge it all to me. I am able to pay their debt. And though it will undo me, though it impoverish all my riches and empty all my accounts, yet I am content to undertake it.

[20 : 05] What a covenant that God the Father and God the Son made. And that's what happened. And God willing, tomorrow we'll see, as we continue studying this song of the suffering Savior, we'll see what God the Son did.

He followed through on His promise. He agreed this covenant in redemption and He humbled Himself from His high and lifted up position and place of exaltation.

And He humbled Himself from the crown of glory all the way down to the cradle in Bethlehem. But He didn't stop there. He went all the way down, down, down to the cruel cross of Calvary.

From the crown to the cradle to the cross. Where He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. And the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.

And with His stripes we are healed. My friend, the mission of the Messiah, the mission of salvation, to save lost sinners such as we are, it all started with this servant King who was wise in His action to humble Himself from the crown of glory to the cradle in Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary.

[21 : 17] from glory to Golgotha to the grave. And as we see from verse 14, the mission wasn't to appear as a king. The mission was to appear as a servant.

The mission wasn't to appear as a king. The mission was to appear as a servant. And you know, this is where the disciples got it all wrong. They often misunderstood the mission of the Messiah to the point that they wanted to make Jesus king over the nation of Israel.

And even James and John, they wanted to share in that high and lofty position. They wanted to be lifted up to that position and place of exaltation because they wanted to sit.

James and John said to Jesus, can we sit one on your right hand and one on your left in your glory? But you know, you read this and you think, well, why didn't you read Isaiah 53?

Why didn't you read this song of the suffering Savior? Why didn't you read it properly? They would have known then that the mission of the Messiah wasn't to appear as a king, but to appear as a servant.

[22 : 25] In fact, the mission of the Messiah was a mission of martyrdom. It was all the way down to the cross. He was a suffering servant who would really suffer as a substitute for his people.

And you know, even from the outside of this song, it's been highlighted to us how much the Son of God was going to suffer. That's not hidden from us. That's put out there on the front porch where we're to see it.

We're going to see how much the Son of God was going to suffer. We're told there in verse 14, as many were astonished at you, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his

form beyond that of the children of mankind.

Now, when it says astonished, as many were astonished at you, when it says astonished, it's not astonished in the sense of amazed. It's astonished in the sense of horrified.

As many were horrified at your appearance. And what they were horrified at was the appearance of this suffering Savior because we're told that his appearance was horrifying.

[23 : 44] His appearance was so marred beyond human recognition. His form, we're told, was so disfigured beyond that of the children of mankind.

His appearance was horrifying. And, you know, this is something I think we often forget when it comes to the cross of Christ. Because, you know, we have all these artistic paintings which seek to picture and portray the cross of Christ as a scene of beauty and a sight of beauty.

But, you know, the cross wasn't beautiful. Golgotha wasn't glorious. Golgotha was gory. Golgotha was gory.

We're told that the physical appearance of Christ on the cross was horrifying. He was battered, as we know. He was bruised.

That's what we read. He was bloodied. His appearance was so marred. He was so disfigured. So defaced that he was unrecognizable. It says there he was beyond human recognition.

[24 : 54] Beyond human semblance. No one could recognize him. His form was disfigured beyond that of the sons of Adam. That's what it literally says.

The children of mankind. The sons of Adam. He didn't look human anymore. That's what they did to him. And, you know, I don't know about you, but the thought of it, it makes my stomach turn.

Almost feeling sick. Especially because, well, I don't like blood at the best of times. In fact, I can't stand the sight of blood. It makes me very squeamish. And Alison, she always makes me watch all these A&E; programs and I hate watching them.

And I spend half the night hiding behind a pillow. I find it horrifying. And, you know, I often think, you know, if we had been at the cruel cross of Calvary that day, if we had witnessed what Jesus experienced and what Jesus endured on our behalf, and of course, we can't enter into the spiritual sufferings, but if we had just seen with our eyes the physical sufferings of Christ, the physical humiliation of the God-man, if we had witnessed it, the suffering servant, we would have said, Golgotha is not glorious.

Golgotha is gory. We would have said, Golgotha is horrifying as hell itself. Golgotha is not the Son of God hanging, battered, and bruised, and bloody on a Roman cross for me.

[26 : 22] His appearance so marred, so disfigured, so defaced that He was unrecognizable. And yet, you look at the cross and you think, we are the reason His appearance was unrecognizable.

We are the reason His appearance was unrecognizable. And so we see in this section of the suffering Savior that the mission of the Messiah reveals His action, His appearance, and then lastly and briefly, His atonement.

His atonement. We'll read again from verse 13. Behold, He says, look and love this. Behold, My servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up, and He shall be exalted.

As many were astonished at you, His appearance was so marred beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the children of mankind. So shall He sprinkle many nations.

Kings shall shut their mouths because of Him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. Now the key word in verse 15 is of course the word sprinkle.

[27 : 43] He shall sprinkle many nations. And as you'd expect, the word sprinkle, it's a priestly word. It's a sacrificial word. You could almost call it an ecclesiastical word.

It's a church word because it refers to the sprinkling of blood upon the mercy seat. He shall sprinkle many nations. It's a sprinkling of blood that took place on the Day of Atonement.

That one day in the year, Yom Kippur, where the high priest would enter through the veil into the Holy of Holies. And how would he enter? He wouldn't enter in with all his glorious garb on him, with his turban on his head.

No, no. He would have removed all that. He would have entered into the Holy of Holies in his position of humility, in a humble position of service.

He would have entered into the Holy of Holies and he would have sprinkled blood on the mercy seat to make atonement for the people. Because everyone knew, everybody outside the tabernacle and the temple, they all knew that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.

[28 : 58] But what's interesting is that the word sprinkle it's not the only priestly word in this section that we're looking at. Because the word appearance in verse 14, the previous verse, it's also a priestly word.

It's a word that refers to the examination a priest would carry out to determine whether or not a worshipper would be declared clean or unclean.

It often happened with those who are leprosy. They had to go to the priest in order to be declared clean. I mean, already from the previous verse, verse 14, that the suffering servant, he was declared unclean.

Unclean. Unclean on the cross at Calvary. He was declared unclean because the glory of the gospel, something we should never lose sight of, is that he who knew no sin became sin for us. He became unclean for us. Our great high priest was declared unclean for us. Why? Verse 15, so shall he sprinkle many nations.

[30 : 08] He became unclean for us so that he would sprinkle the mercy seat of God with the cleansing power of his blood and make atonement for our sin. And you know, that's why the hymn writer reminds us there is power, power, power, wonder, working power in the precious blood of the Lamb.

He shall sprinkle many nations. Because by entering through that veil into the Holy of Holies and sprinkling the mercy seat of God with his own precious blood, our suffering Savior will sprinkle many nations with the cleansing power of his blood.

And that was the promise given to Abraham. Do you remember that? The covenant promise. The promise from eternity was revealed to Abraham through your seat.

All the nations of the earth will be blessed. And here we have it here. He shall sprinkle many nations. All the nations will be sprinkled with the precious blood of this suffering Savior.

It's all here. The power, power, wonder, working power of the Lamb. He will sprinkle many nations.

[31 : 23] But you know, and with this, I'll conclude this evening. As you know, words are important. It's so important for us to highlight different words in the Bible because it just, I think it brings out the text more.

So words are important and there are many interesting words here and important words that are used and we'll see that even tomorrow. But a word that's used as you could say the book ends to this whole song is the word many.

Many. We're told at the beginning of this song that verse 14, many were horrified at your appearance. Verse 15, you will sprinkle many nations.

Then at the end of the song, if you go into chapter 53, we're told there, towards the end of the chapter, we're told there, he shall make many to be accounted righteous.

He shall divide a portion of his inheritance with the many. Verse 12, because he bore the sin of many. The word many is used as bookends to this entire song, the song of the suffering Savior.

[32 : 34] And the reason these bookends are put there is because, well, our suffering Savior is all about the many. Our suffering Savior is all about the many.

He's not about the single and solitary nation of Israel. He's about the whosoever. He's about the many. He's about many nations of this world.

He's about the many in Barvis. He's about the many. Our suffering Savior is about the many. Is that not what Jesus said to us in the gospel? Jesus says, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

He came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. This suffering Savior, he's all about the many.

And the beautiful thing is, we are part of the many. many. We have been brought in to the many. You are one of many. Many who have been sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ.

[33 : 52] My friend, we're looking this evening at the song of the suffering servant, and it's a beautiful song. A beautiful song. This section, the mission, verses 13 to 15, we see, it reveals his action, his appearance, and his atonement.

And as we're considering this song, we'll come to the Lord's table tomorrow, and you know, we'll sing these words. And I want us to sing these words all weekend, and even after we leave here. I want us to keep coming back to this passage and keep singing this song of the suffering Savior, not audibly, but with adoration, to sing with appreciation, to sing with admiration of our suffering Savior, who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for the many.

All for the many. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word, and we thank Thee, O Lord, for the beauty of it, that even in words that were written 700 years before Jesus was even born, words that to us are thousands of years old, and yet they are so relevant.

They present to us so clearly the beauty of our Savior and the wonder of the cross. And Lord, help us, we pray, to sing them, to sing them with adoration of our Savior and appreciation of what He has done, realizing that we are part of the many, being drawn into the flock of God, being sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ.

[35 : 41] Lord, we thank Thee for it. And even as we study this song over this weekend, Lord, our prayer is that we would see Jesus in it more and more, and that in seeing Jesus, it would cause us to love Him more deeply, to walk with Him more closely, and to serve Him more faithfully.

O Lord, bless us together, then we pray. Continue with us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for His sake. Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion again from Psalm 89.

Psalm 89 in the Scottish Psalter, page 346. Page 346, Psalm 89 from verse 24 down to the verse Mark 29.

Psalm 89 at verse 24. Again, it speaks of mercy and faithfulness. That's what we see in verse 24.

And it's these verses in particular speak of this covenant, the covenant of redemption.

The Father, verse 26, speaking to His Son, the Rock. Verse 24, My mercy and my faithfulness, with Him yet still shall be, and in my name His horn and power, men shall exalted see.

[37 : 06] His hand and power shall reach afar, I'll set it in the sea, and His right hand established shall in the rivers be. Thou art my Father, He shall cry, Thou art my God alone, and He shall say, Thou art the rock of my salvation.

And we'll sing on down to the verse 29 of Psalm 89 to God's praise. My mercy and my faithfulness within this shall be peace and that and and Spirit.

Thou art the of Christ is God bless you.

Thou art my Father, He shall cry, Thou art my Lord alone.

And He shall stay the heart of all of my salvation.

[39 : 20] I'll make Him my firstborn, for I love King so many light.

My love I never keep for Him.

My covenant fast shall stand. If He died by my flower, will be forever to endure.

And as the days of Him is grown, shall stable me and sure.

Amen.