

The Cross of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: Foreshadowed: The Lamb and the Sacrifices

Isaiah 53:1–12

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson carries one of the heaviest doctrinal responsibilities in the study, because Isaiah 53 is the great Old Testament prophecy of the atoning death of Christ. Two truths must be held firmly and taught with confidence. First, this is genuine messianic prophecy, written centuries before the events it describes, and fulfilled precisely in the suffering and death of Jesus of Nazareth. The early church read it exactly this way; Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian beginning from this passage, and Peter quotes it directly of Christ. Do not present Isaiah 53 merely as a passage that Christians later applied to Jesus, but as a Spirit-given prediction that God always intended of his Son. Second, the passage teaches substitutionary atonement in the clearest terms in the Old Testament: he was pierced for our transgressions, the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. The sin was ours and the suffering was his, in our place.

Set this chapter against the backdrop of the whole sacrificial system, because that is how the original readers would have understood it and how it points to Christ. For fifteen centuries the lamb at Passover, the goat on the Day of Atonement, and the daily offerings had taught Israel two unchanging lessons: sin brings death, and sin is covered only through the death of an innocent substitute. Yet Hebrews is explicit that the blood of bulls and goats could never truly take away sins; the sacrifices were shadows pointing forward to the one true offering. Isaiah 53 is the hinge where the shadow takes the shape of a person. Help the class see the Servant as the Lamb of God to whom the entire system pointed.

Beyond the doctrine, aim at the heart. The precision of the prophecy is meant not merely to impress but to strengthen faith and to deepen wonder. When students grasp that God described the cross in detail seven hundred years in advance, two things should grow in them: confidence that their salvation was no afterthought but the eternal plan of God, and awe that the punishment they deserved fell upon the willing Servant instead. Lead the class to put their own name into the word *our*, so that he was pierced for our transgressions becomes deeply personal. The formational target is gratitude, trust, and a fresh resolve to follow the Lamb who suffered in their place.

Question 1

Student Question:

Isaiah describes the Servant as “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows” who had “no beauty that we should desire him” (vv. 2–3). Why does God present his Servant in lowliness

rather than splendor, and what does this reveal about the kind of Messiah and the kind of salvation God intended?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the surprising lowliness of the Servant. Isaiah says he had no form or majesty to attract us, no beauty that we should desire him. This is a deliberate reversal of every human expectation of a deliverer. We imagine a savior in splendor, with power that compels admiration. God sends a Servant who is despised and rejected, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

Help the class see what this reveals about the kind of salvation God intended. The Messiah does not save by overwhelming us with majesty but by identifying with us in suffering and bearing our griefs. His lowliness is not a flaw in the plan; it is the plan. He had to be one who could be wounded, who could enter our sorrow, who could die. A Messiah robed only in glory could not have been pierced for our transgressions.

Connect this to the way Jesus actually came, born in obscurity, working as a carpenter, riding a borrowed donkey, dying between two criminals. The world looked for a different kind of king and largely missed him, exactly as Isaiah said, because he did not match their picture of greatness. The cross is the supreme expression of a God whose greatness is revealed in self-giving love rather than in spectacle.

Draw out the encouragement for the class. The Servant who had no majesty to attract us is one we can approach. He is not remote in unapproachable splendor; he is the man of sorrows who knows our grief from the inside. This lowliness is the doorway to intimacy with him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Messiah revealed in lowliness and suffering rather than worldly splendor (Isaiah 53:2-3)
- Salvation accomplished through identification and substitution, not mere display of power
- The incarnation and humility of Christ as essential to his saving work (Philippians 2:6-8)
- God's greatness revealed in self-giving love rather than in spectacle
- The approachability of a Savior who knows our grief from within

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God send a Messiah without majesty or beauty to attract us?
- How does the Servant's lowliness shape the kind of salvation he brings?
- How does it comfort you that your Savior is a man of sorrows acquainted with grief?

Question 2

Student Question:

Isaiah says we esteemed him “not,” and even thought him “stricken, smitten by God” (vv. 3–4). Where in your own life have you misjudged or overlooked the value of Christ and his cross, treating as unimportant the very thing God counts as most precious?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes Isaiah’s confession, we esteemed him not, and makes it personal. Isaiah includes himself and his people in the failure to value the Servant. The same blindness can afflict believers, who may affirm the cross in theory while treating it as unremarkable in practice.

Help students name the ways we undervalue Christ and his cross: rushing past the Lord’s Supper, letting familiarity dull our wonder, giving our best attention to lesser things while treating the cross as old news. What God counts most precious we can come to count as ordinary, simply because we have heard it so often.

There is also the deeper misjudgment Isaiah names: thinking him stricken and smitten by God, as if his suffering meant he was cursed or defeated. We can make a similar mistake when suffering, including our own, looks to us like abandonment by God, when in fact God may be at his deepest work precisely there. The cross teaches us to read suffering differently.

Move toward renewed esteem. The goal is not guilt for past indifference but a fresh valuing of Christ. Invite students to consider one way they will give the cross the attention and gratitude it deserves this week, refusing to let what God treasures most become background noise in their lives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of undervaluing Christ and his cross through familiarity
- Misreading suffering as a sign of God’s curse rather than his hidden purpose
- Treasuring what God treasures most, the death of his Son
- Renewed esteem for Christ as a fruit of meditation on the cross

Discussion Prompts

- In what ways do we let the cross become ordinary or unremarkable to us?
- Where have you misread suffering, your own or another’s, as God’s abandonment?
- What is one way you will give the cross the attention it deserves this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

The heart of the chapter says he was “pierced for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities,” and that “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (vv. 5–6). What does this

teach about substitution, that our sin was placed on him and his suffering was in our place, and why is this the core of what the cross accomplished?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is the doctrinal heart of the chapter and one of the clearest statements of substitution in all of Scripture. Walk the class slowly through the prepositions, because the gospel is in them. He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. The word for means in the place of and on account of. His wounds answer for our sins.

Then comes verse 6, which states the exchange with unforgettable clarity: 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. Picture the movement of that sentence. Our iniquity, which belonged to us, was laid on him. This is substitution: the guilty go free because the innocent bears their guilt. The transfer is real, and it is the core of what the cross accomplished.

Guard the class against weakening this. Some are uncomfortable with the idea that Christ bore our punishment, preferring to speak only of his example or his solidarity with us. Isaiah will not allow the reduction. The chastisement that brought us peace was upon him; with his wounds we are healed. He did not merely sympathize with our condition; he took the penalty of our sin upon himself so that we could have peace with God.

Make it personal and pastoral. The wonder of this passage is not only that someone suffered, but that he suffered in my place. Invite each student to hear the words our and us as including themselves. The peace we enjoy with God cost the Servant his wounds. That is the center of the cross, and everything else in the study radiates out from it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Substitutionary atonement: Christ bore our sin and its penalty in our place (Isaiah 53:5–6)
- The transfer of guilt: the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all
- Peace with God secured by the Servant's suffering, not by our own works
- The reality of penal substitution, against reducing the cross to mere example
- Healing and reconciliation flowing from the wounds of the Servant (1 Peter 2:24)

Discussion Prompts

- What do the words for and laid on him teach us about how the cross works?
- Why is it essential that the sin was ours but the suffering was his?
- How does it change you to hear our transgressions as including your own?

Question 4

Student Question:

Isaiah pictures us as sheep who “have gone astray,” each turning “to his own way” (v. 6). In what specific way have you been going your own way rather than God’s, and how does seeing your wandering laid on the Servant move you toward repentance rather than mere regret?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes Isaiah’s image of straying sheep and presses it home. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. Notice that the definition of sin here is wonderfully simple and convicting: turning to our own way rather than God’s. Sin is not first a list of crimes but a direction, a self-chosen path away from the Shepherd.

Invite honest reflection on the specific shape of each person’s wandering. For one it is a self-willed independence that resists God’s authority; for another, a private area kept off-limits to God; for another, a drift of neglect rather than open rebellion. Sheep rarely run away dramatically; they simply nibble their way, one step at a time, until they are lost.

Then connect the straying to the Servant. The same verse that names our wandering says the Lord laid that wandering on him. This is what moves us from mere regret to genuine repentance. Regret feels bad about consequences; repentance sees our sin laid on Christ and turns back to the Shepherd in grief and gratitude. The sight of the cross is what melts the wandering heart.

Aim at a turning. Ask each student to name one specific way they have been going their own way and to take a concrete step back toward God this week. Repentance is not abstract sorrow but a change of direction, the lost sheep turning at the Shepherd’s voice.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin defined as turning to our own way rather than God’s (Isaiah 53:6)
- The gradual nature of straying, by drift as much as by rebellion
- The difference between worldly regret and godly repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10)
- The cross as the motive that turns the wandering heart back to God

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific way have you been turning to your own way rather than God’s?
- What is the difference between regret over consequences and true repentance?
- What concrete step will you take this week to turn back toward the Shepherd?

Question 5

Student Question:

Verse 7 says that when he was oppressed and afflicted, “he opened not his mouth,” like a lamb led to the slaughter. How does the Servant’s willing, silent submission show us that his death

was not a tragic accident but a chosen sacrifice, and how does this connect him to the Passover lamb and the sacrificial system?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Isaiah now highlights the Servant's silent submission: oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter and a sheep silent before its shearers. This silence is striking and deliberate. It shows that the Servant is not a helpless victim swept along by events, but a willing offering who chooses not to resist.

Help the class see that this willing silence reveals the death of the Servant as a chosen sacrifice rather than a tragic accident. Jesus said no one took his life from him; he laid it down of his own accord. He could have summoned legions of angels. He stood silent before Pilate and Herod, not because he was powerless, but because he had come for this very hour. The willingness is what makes it sacrifice rather than mere murder.

Draw the connection to the sacrificial system. The lamb is the recurring image of Israel's worship, above all the Passover lamb whose blood spared the people, and the daily lambs offered at the altar. By calling the Servant a lamb led to slaughter, Isaiah signals that this is the reality toward which every lamb pointed. John the Baptist will later draw the line directly: behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Let the class feel the weight of a willing sacrifice. The Servant was not overtaken by his suffering; he embraced it for us. This transforms the cross from a sad story of injustice into the deliberate self-offering of love. He was silent so that we could be spared.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The willing, voluntary nature of Christ's sacrifice (Isaiah 53:7; John 10:17–18)
- The Servant as the fulfillment of the Passover lamb and the sacrificial system (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7)
- The cross as deliberate self-offering, not tragic accident
- The silence of the Servant as evidence of submission to the Father's will
- The blood of the lamb as the means of deliverance, fulfilled in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- How does the Servant's silence show that his death was chosen, not merely suffered?
- What does it mean that Jesus is the Lamb to whom all the sacrifices pointed?
- How does a willing sacrifice change the way you read the story of the cross?

Question 6

Student Question:

The Servant suffered in silence and entrusted himself to God rather than defending himself or retaliating. Where are you tempted to repay wrong with wrong or to demand your rights, and what would it look like this week to follow the pattern of the Lamb who did not open his mouth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question draws a line from the Servant's silent submission to the believer's daily life. Isaiah shows the Servant entrusting himself to God rather than defending himself or retaliating, and Peter will later hold this up as the very pattern we are to follow: when he was reviled, he did not revile in return, but entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Help students locate the places where they are tempted to repay wrong with wrong, to insist on their rights, to get the last word, to nurse a grievance until it becomes bitterness. The Servant shows another way, not weakness or passivity, but a deep trust that frees us from the exhausting work of self-defense and revenge.

Be careful to clarify what this does and does not mean. Following the silent Lamb does not mean tolerating injustice everywhere or never speaking truth; Jesus himself spoke boldly when it served his Father's purpose. It means surrendering the desire for vengeance, refusing to repay evil for evil, and entrusting our cause to the God who judges justly.

Aim at one concrete practice. Ask each student to name a relationship or situation where they will choose, this week, not to retaliate but to entrust themselves to God. This is how the cross reshapes character: the Lamb who suffered for us becomes the pattern of how we suffer wrong.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Entrusting ourselves to God rather than retaliating (1 Peter 2:21–23)
- The renunciation of personal vengeance, leaving justice to God (Romans 12:19)
- The difference between Christlike non-retaliation and passive tolerance of evil
- The cross as the pattern for how Christians bear being wronged

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to repay wrong with wrong or demand your rights?
- What does it look like to entrust yourself to God rather than defend yourself?
- In what specific situation this week will you follow the pattern of the silent Lamb?

Question 7

Student Question:

Isaiah foretells that he would be "cut off out of the land of the living," assigned "a grave with the wicked," yet "with a rich man in his death," and that he had done "no violence" and spoken no deceit (vv. 8–9). Why does it matter that the sinless Servant died the death of the guilty, and how were these details fulfilled with such precision in Jesus?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Isaiah continues with details of the Servant's death and burial that are striking in their precision. He would be cut off out of the land of the living, struck for the transgression of God's people. He would be assigned a grave with the wicked, yet be with a rich man in his death. And all of this would happen though he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Press the central tension: the sinless one dies the death of the guilty. He had done no violence and spoken no deceit, and yet he is numbered with transgressors and given a criminal's sentence. This is substitution again, now in the language of the courtroom and the grave. The innocent takes the place of the guilty so completely that he dies their death and is buried among them.

Show the class how exactly these details were fulfilled. Jesus was condemned though Pilate found no fault in him; he was crucified between two criminals, assigned a grave with the wicked; and he was buried in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, exactly as Isaiah foretold both the grave with the wicked and the burial with the rich. Such precision, written seven centuries before, is not coincidence but prophecy.

Let the doctrinal point land. It matters enormously that the one who died for us was without sin, for only a sinless substitute could bear the sin of others without having to answer for his own. The lamb of sacrifice had to be without blemish. The Servant's perfect innocence is what qualifies him to stand in our place, and his death among the guilty is the measure of how fully he took that place.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sinlessness of the Servant qualifying him to bear the sin of others (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 1:19)
- The innocent dying the death of the guilty as the heart of substitution
- The precise fulfillment of the burial details in Jesus (Matthew 27:38, 57–60)
- Prophecy fulfilled as evidence of God's sovereign plan
- The unblemished lamb as the type of the sinless Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the Servant who died for us was completely sinless?
- How were the details of his death and burial fulfilled so exactly in Jesus?
- What does the innocent dying the death of the guilty teach about substitution?

Question 8

Student Question:

Isaiah wrote these words some seven hundred years before Christ. How does the exact fulfillment of this prophecy strengthen your confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture and in God's sovereign plan, and how might that confidence steady you the next time your faith is tested?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the precision of the prophecy toward the believer's confidence in Scripture and in God's plan. Isaiah wrote these words some seven hundred years before the cross, and the fulfillment is detailed and verifiable: the rejection, the silence, the death among criminals, the burial with the rich, the sin-bearing, the vindication that follows.

Help the class draw the right conclusion. Fulfilled prophecy of this kind is one of God's gifts to strengthen faith. It tells us that the cross was no accident of history or failure of plans, but the deliberate purpose of God announced long in advance. The same God who foretold the cross in such detail can be trusted to keep every other promise he has made.

Address honest questions with confidence. Skeptics sometimes claim Isaiah 53 was written after the fact or refers only to the nation of Israel. Without turning the class into a debate, the teacher can note that this prophecy stands in a book written centuries before Christ, that the early Christians and Jesus himself read it as messianic, and that no figure in history fits its details as Jesus does. The point is not to win an argument but to ground the class in the trustworthiness of God's word.

Then make it personal and steadying. A faith anchored in a God who plans and keeps his word can weather seasons of testing. When circumstances seem chaotic, the believer can remember that the cross itself, the darkest hour in history, was held within the sovereign plan of God, foretold and fulfilled. The God who was in control then is in control now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fulfilled prophecy as God's gift to strengthen faith (Isaiah 46:9-10; 2 Peter 1:19-21)
- The trustworthiness and inspiration of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- The cross as God's sovereign plan, foretold and fulfilled, not an accident
- Confidence in God's promises grounded in his proven faithfulness

Discussion Prompts

- How does the exact fulfillment of this prophecy strengthen your trust in Scripture?
- What does it mean for your faith that the cross was planned and foretold by God?
- How might this confidence steady you the next time your faith is tested?

Question 9

Student Question:

Verse 10 makes the most startling claim of all: “it was the will of the Lord to crush him,” and yet through his suffering “he shall see his offspring” and “the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand,” for he “makes himself an offering for guilt” and bears “the sin of many” (vv. 10–12). Explain how this passage presents the cross as God’s deliberate, planned act of substitutionary atonement, written centuries beforehand and fulfilled precisely in Jesus. How does it hold together the Father’s sovereign will, the Servant’s willing offering, and the salvation of the many?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it requires careful handling, because verse 10 makes a claim that can be misunderstood: it was the will of the Lord to crush him. The class must grasp that the cross was not merely something wicked men did to Jesus, though it was that; it was, at the deepest level, the deliberate and planned act of God to save sinners. The Father willed it, the Son embraced it, and the salvation of the many was the result.

Hold three truths together, because the verse holds them together. First, the Father’s sovereign will: it pleased the Lord to bruise him, not out of cruelty, but because through this offering the will of the Lord, the saving of a people, would prosper in his hand. Second, the Servant’s willing offering: he makes himself an offering for guilt, the language of the guilt offering from the sacrificial system, given voluntarily. Third, the salvation of the many: he shall bear their iniquities, he shall make many to be accounted righteous. This is substitutionary atonement, planned by God, accomplished by the willing Servant, for the benefit of many.

Address the doctrinal sensitivities directly but pastorally. First, this is genuine prophecy written centuries beforehand and fulfilled precisely in Jesus, not a tale read back into an ancient text. Treat it with that confidence. Second, guard the universal scope of the atonement. The many whom the Servant justifies are not a narrow, predetermined elect from whom others are excluded by divine decree. Scripture is clear that Christ gave himself a ransom for all, that he tasted death for everyone, and that he is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. The many simply describes the great multitude who will actually be saved through him; it never means that Christ died only for a select few. Reject any notion of limited atonement; the offering was made for all, and the invitation is open to all.

Show how the verse resolves into triumph. The chapter does not end at the grave. Because he poured out his soul to death, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. This points beyond the cross to the resurrection and to the vast family of the redeemed. The crushing was real, but it was not the end; it was the means by which God brought many sons and daughters to glory.

Let the wonder of the planned cross land on the class. From eternity, before the foundation of the world, God purposed to redeem us at this cost. The cross was not plan B. It was the will of the Lord, the offering of the Servant, and the salvation of the many, all foreseen and foretold in this astonishing chapter. To grasp this is to fall down in worship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as God's deliberate, sovereign plan, not merely a human crime (Isaiah 53:10; Acts 2:23)
- Substitutionary atonement: the Servant as a guilt offering bearing the sin of many (Isaiah 53:10–12)
- The willing self-offering of the Servant alongside the Father's sovereign will
- The universal scope of the atonement: Christ died for all, against limited atonement (1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2)
- The resurrection and the multitude of the redeemed foreshadowed in he shall see his offspring
- Genuine messianic prophecy written centuries beforehand and fulfilled precisely in Jesus

Discussion Prompts

- How does this passage hold together the Father's will, the Servant's willing offering, and our salvation?
- Why is it important to affirm that Christ died for all and not only for a select few?
- How does it deepen your worship to know the cross was God's plan from of old?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Isaiah 53 as a whole, this portrait of the Servant wounded for you, painted ages before the cross. Name one specific way that seeing the cross foreshadowed and foretold deepens your gratitude and trust, and one concrete way you will respond to the Lamb who bore your sin this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the whole portrait of the Servant and asks for a personal response. Remind the class of what they have seen: a Messiah in lowliness, pierced for our transgressions, the iniquity of us all laid on him, a willing lamb silent before his shearers, the sinless one dying the death of the guilty, all foretold seven centuries in advance and fulfilled in precise detail, and all the deliberate plan of God.

Invite each student to name one specific way that seeing the cross foreshadowed and foretold deepens their gratitude and trust. For one it may be fresh wonder that God planned their rescue from of old; for another, a steadier confidence in Scripture; for another, the deeply personal realization that the wounds were his and the sin was theirs.

Then ask for one concrete response to the Lamb who bore their sin this week, whether deeper worship, renewed repentance from going their own way, or following the Servant's pattern of entrusting themselves to God when wronged. End by pointing forward: the Servant

foreshadowed here is the same Christ the next lesson will meet in the New Testament, where Peter takes up Isaiah 53 and shows it fulfilled in the suffering of Jesus our example and Savior.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as the planned center of God's redemptive purpose, foreshadowed and fulfilled
- Personal appropriation of substitution: the sin was mine, the wounds were his
- Gratitude, trust, and repentance as the fitting response to the suffering Servant
- Following the Lamb in daily life as the fruit of beholding him

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing the cross foretold so long beforehand deepen your gratitude and trust?
- Which part of the Servant's portrait moved you most, and why?
- What is one concrete way you will respond to the Lamb who bore your sin this week?