

# The Cross of Christ

## Lesson 3: Foreshadowed: The Lamb and the Sacrifices -- Isaiah 53:1-12

Imagine reading a detailed description of a person's life, a portrait so exact that it names his rejection, his silence under accusation, the manner of his death between criminals, and his burial in a rich man's grave. Now imagine learning that the portrait was written some seven hundred years before the man was born. You would not call it a lucky guess. You would lean in and ask who could possibly have known. That is precisely the experience of reading Isaiah 53. Centuries before a cross was ever raised outside Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah painted the suffering and death of Jesus with such precision that the early church could hardly preach the cross without quoting these verses.

Isaiah calls him the Servant of the Lord, and the picture is heartbreaking. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. And then, at the center of the chapter, comes the line that unlocks everything: he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement that brought us peace was upon him, and with his wounds we are healed. The Servant does not suffer for anything he did. He suffers for what we did. The sins were ours; the wounds were his.

This chapter did not come out of nowhere. For fifteen centuries God had been teaching his people through a system of sacrifices, a lamb at Passover, a goat on the Day of Atonement, blood poured out morning and evening at the altar. Every one of those sacrifices whispered the same two truths: sin is deadly serious, and sin can be covered only by the death of a substitute. But the blood of bulls and goats could never truly take away sins. They were pictures, shadows cast ahead of time by a reality still to come. Isaiah 53 is where the shadow begins to take the shape of a person, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So read this chapter slowly, and read it as a Christian must, in the light of Calvary. When Philip found the Ethiopian official puzzling over these very verses, asking of whom the prophet speaks, Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with this Scripture, told him the good news about Jesus. We will do the same. Isaiah saw, from a great distance and through the eyes of faith, the One who would be wounded for us. We look back at the same scene and see it fulfilled in exact and astonishing detail. Let the precision of this prophecy do two things in you: let it strengthen your confidence that God planned the cross from of old, and let it deepen your wonder that the punishment you deserved fell, instead, upon him.

**Group Discussion:** Most people are impressed by a prediction that comes true. Why do you think God chose to describe the suffering of his Servant in such detail centuries before it happened? What might the precision of this prophecy be meant to do for our faith, beyond simply impressing us?

**Personal Reflection:** Read slowly the words “he was pierced for our transgressions” and put your own name in the place of “our.” When you consider that the sins were yours but the wounds were his, what rises in you, and where do you most need to let that truth sink from your head into your heart?

*Read Isaiah 53:1–12*

## **Study Questions**

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

### **Now or Later**

Reflect on these passages: John 1:29, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; Acts 8:32–35, Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian from this very passage; 1 Peter 2:24–25, he bore our sins in his body on the tree; Hebrews 10:1–14, the law was a shadow, and by one offering Christ has perfected us; Exodus 12:1–13, the Passover lamb whose blood spared the people.