

The Servant's Prudence

Isaiah 52:13-15

Halifax: 12 December 2010

Introduction:

Dear congregation,

- The human race is in deep deep trouble.
 - There is no question about it.
 - We were created in the very image of God, but almost as soon as we came from our creator's hand, we rebelled against Him!
 - We—the ones who were made to live in holy communion with our maker!
 - We—the ones who were privileged to live in the beauty of His image, living out the beauty of that image on a human level—a copy of Him in miniature—a beautiful reflection of His love and wisdom.
 - We—the ones for whom this whole earth was made and for whom the garden of pleasures was prepared!
- And just look at us—fallen into ruin and misery!
 - We are ugly.
 - The image of God is marred.
 - There is strife and discord among us.
 - There is lying and cheating and oppression and greed.
 - There is bitterness and strife, even in our own homes.
 - We are cut off from our Maker so that we no longer see His glory and His beauty and no longer live under His favour.
 - The very earth, our habitation, has been cursed...
 - And we ourselves, created to have dominion in the earth, are sentenced to return to dust, only to be raised up that we may be judged and made to lie down in torment.
- My friends, we are so far from what we were made to be!
 - We are so used to our condition that we forget to be horrified by it...
 - We forget the heights from which we have fallen.
 - Isaiah has shown us that even the people who were called out from the world to be reconciled to God miserably spurn His grace.
 - Even Isaiah himself, upon seeing the beauty and glory of God in his vision, cried out in desperation:
 - Isa 6:5: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

- He was awakened to a sense of his own depravity.
- And he was told that God's very covenant people had so infuriated Him that they were sentenced to be cut off, all but a remnant of grace.
 - God had called to them over and over, offering them grace and salvation, but they would not come to Him.
 - If these are the people that God specially called out of the ruined mass of fallen sinful human beings, what hope do we have?
 - What can be done for us in our miserable fallen condition?
 - Is there anyone who knows what to do that we might be delivered?

Yes there is!

- There is one who is Himself called wisdom.
 - He not only knows what must be done, but He has acted with prudence.
 - He is Christ, the wisdom of God and the power of God.
 - He is the One that Isaiah has already introduced to us a Son that would be given to us and upon whose shoulder the government would rest.
 - He is the banner who is lifted up and draws all nations to Himself.
 - He is the One that Isaiah has called the Servant of the LORD who comes forth to do the will of God when everyone else fails.
 - And in the very first verse of our text today—in Isaiah 52:13—
 - God Himself speaks of Him and says of Him:
 - “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently!”
 - He is God's Servant, the One God has sent to do His work...
 - And that He “deals prudently” means that He knows what to do and does it.
 - He knows what to do for our salvation and it is not what anyone would have ever expected!
 - The path of prudence is the path that leads through deep degradation and shame for Him—
 - shame that causes many to be astonished—
 - but that leads to such glory and success that the kings of the nations are left speechless when they once understand it!
- In Isaiah 52:13-15, we have the introduction to that marvellous chapter in scripture that most fully explains the reason for Christ's sufferings...
 - That He suffered to atone for our sins,
 - that His sufferings are vicarious in nature,
 - that He died in the place of guilty sinners that we might be pardoned.

- Isaiah presents the nature of His work as the One who bears the curse for the sins of His people more clearly than that work is presented any where else in the Bible!
 - The ancient Jews understood that this spoke of the Messiah.
 - Every true Christian immediately recognises Him in this passage.
 - It is impossible to miss Him a part from serious blindness.
 - I know of a man who was a secular Jew who had this passage read to him by a Christian and the Jew said, “don’t give me that stuff from the New Testament...”
 - And the Christian said, “It’s not from the New Testament—its from Isaiah!”
 - Unbelieving Old Testament scholars wet themselves when they come to this passage.
 - They just don’t know what to do with it.
 - I read a paper by one of these experts who was trying to figure out of whom this passage was written—was it about Isaiah—was about Israel in general—was it about Hezekiah?
 - His final conclusion was that there was no way to tell.
 - One thing that was out of the question for him—it could not be about Jesus because Jesus was not born yet.
- But for any honest person who comes to this passage—there is no doubt that it is about Jesus.
 - What holy ground we come to when we come to this passage!
 - How beautiful our Saviour appears here, in all His suffering, that leads to glory!
- Now that we have come to this great passage, we are going to slow down our pace and ponder what is revealed to us here about Him...
 - We want to ponder it well.
 - We want it to soak down into us and stay with us.
 - We want to pray that we will be deeply moved as we gaze upon our Saviour as He is here revealed to us in the principal work He came to accomplish.
- This glorious passage (from Isaiah 52:13 to the end of chapter 53) is divided into five sections,
 - each three verses long,
 - each showing us something about our redeemer.
 - The first section, which we will look at today, tells us about His prudence.
 - The second one, in Isa 53:1-3, reveals to us His humble patience.
 - The third section, verses 4-6, shows us His self-less service.
 - The fourth section, verses 7-9, tells us about His atoning sacrifice.
 - And the last section in vs 10-12, speaks of His obedience that pleased the Father.

Today we are going to focus on the first section: “The Servant’s prudence.”

- With reverence, let us move forward...

I. First, see that the Servant’s prudence leads to glory.

- The Father says of Him:
 - Isa 52:13: “Behold, My servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high”

A. That is what prudence is—it is wisdom—wisdom that causes a person to see what he must do to achieve his purpose!

1. A businessman has prudence when he knows how to invest his resources so as to make a profit.

- He knows how to lay out his business plan.
- He knows how to allocate his resources.
- He knows how to solve problems and difficulties when they arise.

a. But who could have possibly known what to do for mankind in his miserable fallen condition?

- Who among the sons of men could come forth with a plan that would have brought salvation and deliverance to us when we had sinned against God?
 - It is far far beyond us to come up with such a thing!
 - The message of the gospel is a message that no man could have *ever* dreamed up.
 - Men laugh at it until God opens their understanding...
 - They have all their foolish schemes to solve man’s problem—everything from denial of the problem to suicide bombing...

b. But the Father says, “My Servant shall deal prudently...”

- He will know what He must do!
- He will fully understand what must be done if salvation is to be brought to the world.

c. Our Lord Jesus, having come from heaven and taken upon Him human flesh,

- had to learn what must be done from His heavenly Father.
 - All along, He listens to the Father and does what He is told by Him.
 - He knows that the way of prudence is to listen to the Father and to do His will...
 - the very thing that we did not do when we, the human race, fell into sin.

- We listened to the serpent who told us that we would be wise if we did not listen to the Father—and he still convinces blind, deluded sinners of this today.
 - As soon as God’s will is heard, he says, “Oh no, you don’t want to do that! Did God say that? He can’t have meant that...”
 - And we buy into this talk...
 - But our Saviour knew that the way of prudence—the only way that leads to success—is to listen to the Father and to do His will.
2. But dealing prudently is more than merely knowing what to do—it is in doing the Father’s will!
- a. The one who deals prudently follows through with what must be done, regardless of whatever difficulties he may encounter.
 - To return to our businessman again,
 - He does not deal prudently unless he acts with discipline and self-control.
 - While a foolish man would take his initial capital and buy an expensive car to create an image...
 - (he feels rich because he has money in his hand from his business loan)
 - The prudent man invests in what will bring him a good return.
 - He drives an old beater around until he gets fully established...
 - His foolish counterpart struts around with his expensive clothes and car, but then he has nothing after ten years...
 - Then he looks with envy at the prudent man and wonders what happened—some guys are just lucky.
 - b. So often as soon as we run into difficulties associated with doing the Father’s will, we start to question His will...
 - I realise that I ought to keep the Sabbath, but my family is really upset about it because I did not want to go to my nephew’s birthday party on Sunday.
 - So then I start to waver and to think that maybe doing God’s will is not quite what I want to do...
 - I don’t actually say it that way, but I start to question what His word says and to look for loopholes and justifications for slacking off.
 - Eventually I do slack off.
 - That is too often the way with us!
 - c. Solomon was a wise man in that he knew what ought to be done.

- But he did not act prudently because he lacked self-control in the face of temptation...
 - Instead of dealing prudently, he dealt foolishly and ended up sowing the seeds that led to the destruction of the theocracy.
 - He was unable to keep himself from foreign women, even though he wrote so wisely and nobly about such folly in the Proverbs.
 - These foreign brought idols into Israel.
 - You can learn from this that it is not enough to *know* what ought to be done.
 - The prudent man must also *do* what needs to be done.
 - That involves sacrifice and restraint—especially when it comes to bringing deliverance from a fallen world.
- d. So Jesus’ prudence is seen in that He sticks with the Father’s will even when it involves great suffering for Him.
- He bears with the suffering (which we will look at in a moment) to achieve the desired outcome.
- B. And you see that right from the outset of this great section about our Saviour’s suffering for us, Isaiah tells us that the servant’s prudent behaviour leads to glory!
- Verse 13 says, “He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high!”
1. Three very strong words are used to explain the heights to which the Servant will be raised because of following the path of prudence!
- a. These three words could be used to refer to:
- His resurrection (that He is exalted or raised up),
 - His ascension (extolled means that He soars),
 - and His session (He is very high—given dominion over all, seated at the right hand of the majesty on high).
- b. Even unbelieving linguists suggest that the prophet is using words that are otherwise used to speak of deity.
- One of them says:
 - “The Servant here is actually described in terms of divinity. The phrases *shall be exalted* and *lifted up* are representative expressions from earlier literature.”
 - One place that two of these terms are used is in Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah says:
 - Isa 6:1: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.
 - And in Isaiah 57:15, he says:

- Isa 57:15: For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.
- c. We can't read this verse without thinking of Philippians 2 where we are told that:
- Phil 2:9-11: Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
 - We learned before in Isaiah that in confessing that Jesus is LORD, He is given the very name of Yahweh, the self-existing one.
 - When we confess that He is LORD, we are not simply saying that He is our master.
 - We are acknowledging that His is the name that is above every name, that He is none other than Yahweh.
2. But the Son of God, after He was incarnate, was not given this name until after He had done the Father's will...
- It was not until after He had dealt prudently by doing all that the Father had given Him to do for our salvation.
 - He did not have the honour of the exaltation until He had finished His work.
 - In a fallen world, God does not exalt the proud, but the humble.
 - Having become a man in this fallen world, real work had to be done before real glory could be given to Him or to His Church.
 - It was not until Jesus came forth from the grave that He told His disciple that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him.
 - It was not until then that He was exalted and given the name above every name.
 - He was already exalted as the Son of God, but as the Mediator who had come in our flesh, He was not exalted until He had done the Father's will.
 - Peter makes the timing of His exaltation quite clear in Acts 2:32-36 when He says:
 - Acts 2:32-36: This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your

footstool.” Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

- When this is true of our Saviour, how wrong it is of us to expect to be exalted before we have been humbled!
- But look at Him now!
 - Now, as our mediator—our brother—He has been given the name that is above every name!
 - He is exalted! He is extolled! He is very high!
 - all because He dealt prudently!

TRANS> And now I want you see that path to which doing the will of the Father brought Him.

- This is the second think I want you to consider from our text...

II. Second, see that His prudence leads Him to bear great shame and suffering.

A. We are told in verse 14 that those who saw Him were astonished...

- The Father says to His son...
 - Isa 52:14: Just as many were astonished at you...
- 1. The word translated *astonished* is a very strong word.
 - It speaks of one who is desolated, appalled, stunned, stupefied, awestruck!
 - Although the men of Jesus’ day were familiar seeing men crucified, they saw a certain horror in this man’s death that went far beyond the ordinary!
 - Even the heavens were darkened against Him and the earth shook.
- 2. And as verse 14 continues we are told that He hardly even looked like a man at all having been so battered.
 - It says:
 - Isa 52:14: So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men.
 - The idea is that the onlookers not only said, “Is this He, beaten beyond recognition?” but they also said “Is this human!”

B. I tell you, when He was on that cross, it did not look like He had dealt prudently at all!

1. It looked like this was the end of Him—a man with a failed ministry! a man cursed of God!
 - As you know, the mockers made sure to point all this out!
 - “He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now!”
 - “He saved others, Himself He cannot save!”

2. Learn from this how very short-sighted we are—how we judge before the time!
 - a. We measure a man's prudence by how he gets on this world—and that is how we too often measure our own.
 - But the only judgement that matters is the judgement of God!
 - A person has not necessarily been prudent until we see what the outcome is on the day of judgement.
 - You can gain all the world by worldly wisdom and lose your own soul, and if you do, what have you really gained?
 - Nothing but a great height in this world to fall from on judgement day.
 - b. Let me urge you to gain an eternal perspective.
 - Exaltation comes from God! It comes to those who humble themselves!
 - Do not look at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
 - Jesus' suffering, though He bore the eternal curse, was yet temporal in that it ended, and then led to His exaltation.
 - If we suffer with Him, identifying ourselves as His disciples, we will be glorified with Him.
 - If we are ashamed of Him, we may get on okay in this world and feel that we are very high, but we will be abased at the end.
 - It all depends on God!
 - The one He exalts will be exalted forever.
 - The one He abases will be abased forever.
 - The prudent man knows this and lives accordingly.
- C. But it is very difficult for us to follow the path of prudence when everything seems to be going wrong.
1. This is especially so when we run into hardship in doing something for others...
 - When we looked at vows in our study of the third commandment, we looked at Ecclesiastes where we are warned about making rash vows...
 - It is very easy to dream and envision yourself going forth and serving your neighbour—you have the best of intentions when you anticipate it...
 - Even if it is something simple—like resolving that you will call your mother every week—in planning it, it seems very easy to do.
 - You are sure that you do it.

- But what happens when you get into the actual carrying out of those plans?
 - It is a different story—you have tiredness, you have business to attend to, you have sickness, you have a million things and it is not so easy.
 - Serving seems easy until we undertake to do it—then opposition stops us.
 - How often do you actually follow through with the good things you *intend* to do?
2. I say this to give you an even greater appreciation for our LORD Jesus!
- We have already seen in previous chapters that He set His face like a flint to do the will of God.
 - He was so committed that even the pains and the shame of the cross could not stop Him from doing the will of God!
 - That is what true prudence is all about!
 - This is what true love—for us and for His Father—did.
 - It is following the path of God’s will to the end, no matter how hard it may get to go on.
 - We who so quickly wilt under the least opposition have no idea what it was for our LORD to follow through with His sufferings to the end.
 - The best way to learn more about what He went through is to start sticking to the will of God yourself.
 - This is what Paul spoke of as the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.
 - He said that His goal was to know Christ and the fellowship of His sufferings.
 - When you are prudent and you do the will of God no matter what, you learn of the depths to which your Saviour went for you.
 - He is the one who followed through and acted prudently despite all manner of difficulty.

TRANS> So if we put together the two things that we have looked at so far, we come up with this:

- That Jesus’ was so prudent that He continued in the will of God despite great hardship and this led to His exaltation.
 - But now lastly, Isaiah shows us in these introductory verses just what it was that the Son of God accomplished by His sufferings...

III. Third, see that His prudence brings cleansing *for* the nations and admiration *from* the nations.

- A. All that suffering that He bore was that He might sprinkle many nations!
- Verse 15 says, “So shall He sprinkle many nations.”
1. What does this mean? to sprinkle many nations?
 - a. *Sprinkle* is a technical term for purification and cleansing under the law.
 - 1) For example, in Lev 8:30, Moses sprinkles Aaron and his garments with oil and with blood from the altar to consecrate him.
 - 2) And in Lev 14:7, a leper is cleansed by sprinkling a mixture of blood and water.
 - 3) On the Day of Atonement, Aaron was instructed in Lev 16, to sprinkle the blood of the bull at the mercy seat for his own sins,
 - and then he was to sprinkle it again with the blood of a goat for the sins of the people...
 - as it says in verse 16, “because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins;”
 - b. In Hebrews, these sprinklings are compared to the sprinkling that Jesus Christ does to us with His own blood.
 - Turn to Hebrews 9 and you can see this for yourself.
 - If you look at verses 6-10, you can see that it is talking about the ritual we just read about in Lev 16 in which the priest went into the holy place,
 - first with the blood of a bull for his own sins,
 - and then with the blood of a goat for the people’s sins.
 - Reading from verse 7, it says:
 - Heb 9:7-10: But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience — concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings (literally baptisms), and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.
 - But then the passage goes on to tell us that now we are sprinkled with something much better—the blood of Jesus Christ!
 - Look at verse 11-14
 - Heb 9:11-14: But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and

calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

2. And this sprinkling of the nations by the blood of Jesus is fulfilled by Jesus sending His disciples out into the world to preach the gospel.
 - a. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus commanded His disciples in what we call the great commission:
 - Matthew 28:18: And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.
 - b. This is the fulfillment of Isaiah 52:15—He shall sprinkle many nations!
 - The Jews expected the Messiah to come and baptise because of these prophecies...
 - That is why they asked John why he was baptising since he was not the Messiah.
 - Baptism was ordinarily done by sprinkling in the Old Testament and Jesus, having suffered to atone for the sins of the world,
 - sends His disciples out to preach the gospel and call the nations to repentance and baptism.
 - They are to come confessing Him as Lord and Saviour, submitting to be baptised by Him who cleanses them from their sins.
 - In Hebrews 10:19-22, it says:
 - Heb 10:19-22: Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.
 - We come to God as those who have been purified by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.
 - That is the wonderful outcome for us of His great suffering!
 - That is the outcome of His continuing to the will of God even though obedience to the will of God took Him through such pain for our sake!

- What a loving faithful Saviour!
- What a prudent Saviour!
- He dealt prudently, so now He is able to cleanse the nations!
- He is the solution!

TRANS> Before we saw that many were astonished at His sufferings—such great sufferings!

- They supposed that His was not the path of prudence at all but the path of folly!
 - What a terrible end He had come to!
 - But now we have seen that ruin was not the end at all.

B. How the assessment of Christ and His sufferings is changed from derision to the deepest admiration—even by kings—when they understand the outcome!

1. Now it is understood that His suffering was for the cleansing of the nation's that the nations might be sprinkled—that they might be reconciled to God!

- Many were astonished at Him in His sufferings—
 - Now kings stand silenced by awe and admiration of Him!
 - Isa 52:15: “Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard, they shall consider!”

2. The nations had no idea what Christ was doing until after it was accomplished!

- How could they have known?
 - It had not been told to them.
 - Even the Jews who had the prophets and the law did not understand what was happening when Christ suffered on the cross!
 - The Gentiles had not even been told.

3. But once they are told!!! Once they see and understand!!!

- They are speechless!
 - To think that God's own Son has come and suffered like this—for them—for them when they did not even know He was doing it!
 - When everyone thought Him a fool and a failure!
 - Suddenly they see prudence that boggles their minds!
 - Suddenly they are filled with admiration for this Saviour and His amazing prudence!
 - They had no idea what He was doing, the Jews had not idea—
 - they mocked Him and they derided Him—
 - but He carried through with His plan for them!

C. And now I have a question for you...

1. Have *you* been struck with what this prudent Saviour has done?
 - Have you a deep admiration for Him now that you have heard the gospel?
 - Has it all come to make sense to you?

2. I grew up with some knowledge of the gospel.
 - I knew that Jesus died on the cross and I even knew that He had died for sins.
 - But I did not really grasp what this meant until I was in university.
 - It was then that I saw and considered what He had actually done!
 - It was like I had been in the darkness and then the lights came on.

 - But now after almost thirty years of believing,
 - I am more amazed than I was even at the start at the marvellous wisdom of my Saviour.
 - This is something for us all to meditate on.
 - In Christ, we see the wisdom of God revealed to us.
 - We learn of our God that we might admire Him!

3. Let us pray as the Apostle Paul prayed that we who have come to admire our prudent Saviour may come to admire Him even more!
 - Eph 1:15-23: Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Conclusion: Brothers and sisters, His wisdom is on display for all of us to see!

- Turn your eyes upon Him and marvel!