

ISAIAH 53 MAN OF SORROWS AND CONQUEROR OF DEATH! – PART I

This is certainly one unique and perfect prophecy – perhaps the most interesting in the Old Testament Scriptures. It is a touching and faithful account – prophetically recorded – of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” No wonder that Martin Luther exhorted all persons to “commit it to memory, for the strengthening of their faith!” This was the portion of Holy Scripture which engrossed the attention of the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert of Gaza. When Philip had seated himself in the chariot, he took these words as his text; and he did not hesitate to give them their one legitimate interpretation: “He began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). Indeed, the whole theme and language of this chapter forbids any attempted application to any other person.

The humiliation of our Lord Jesus would be so unlike the august Being Who had been depicted in the earlier pages of Isaiah’s prophecy as “Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace!” (chapter 9:6) The prophet knows that his words would be received with scornful incredulity: “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” (verse 1) It would seem strange that the great work of redemption would be accomplished by the apparent weakness of suffering humanity, in the Person of the lowly Man of Sorrows! He is described as being disfigured with grief – as if the very beauty of a perfect and ideal manhood were so scarred and mutilated with oppressive and continuous woe as to be totally unrecognizable. We might have imagined that the Servant of Jehovah would come to earth in the form of a mighty Prince, with a glittering diadem upon His head, followed by a splendid retinue, and decked out in robes of royalty that are so captivating to the human eye. But instead of this, there is nothing attractive in His appearance. He is a despised and rejected “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” His countrymen esteemed Him to be “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted,” as if He was enduring personal retribution for personal sin.

But this picture of the suffering Servant has a far different explanation when it is viewed in the light of vicarious sacrifice! The idea of substitutionary suffering permeates this entire prophecy – pointing to a load of anguish that was not endured for His own sins, but for those of others. And this anguish was without equal in the annals of human suffering. “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” “He was wounded for our transgressions.” “He was bruised for our iniquities.” His very stripes and bruises which disfigured His

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A description of the reproach and general rejection of Christ – verses 1-3
- ❖ A picture of the sufferings that He endured to redeem His people – verses 4-9
- ❖ The humiliation and subsequent exaltation of Christ are minutely described, as well as the blessings to mankind that flow from His death – verses 10-12



Body were the blessed symbols of our everlasting healing. The bloody ceremonies of the Levitical priesthood had their fulfillment and interpreter in Him Who was “brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” Come and let us mar-

vel and adore, as we contemplate this mysterious doctrine: the sinless, immaculate Savior bearing our iniquities, and dying in our place – “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God!” Truly such a plan of salvation is beyond the understanding of human reason! Truly, in this instance, God’s thoughts are not man’s thoughts; nor are His ways man’s ways. “He gives me,” says Luther, “what is His, and I give Him what is mine. I give Him all my sins; and He gives me back, in exchange, all His righteousness.”

Isaiah’s remarkable utterances only found their true explanation in the expiatory sacrifice of the great Redeemer and Divine Substitute – upon Whose sinless head, the Lord laid the burden of His people’s transgressions. In the language of Peter, “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree; by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). And Jesus Himself, in the days of His flesh, declared that He had come “to give his life a ransom for many.” “Thus it behoved Christ to suffer” (Luke 24:46). He redeemed us from the curse of the law, by submitting to be made a curse for us. But this same chapter, which so minutely describes Christ’s abasement and humiliation, closes with the sublime picture of His triumph over death, and with His exaltation at the right hand of the Father. The victorious Conqueror defeated Satan and reclaimed the immortal souls whom he had taken captive. Then the triumphant Redeemer ascended to His Father’s right hand, where He sees the fruit of His soul’s travail, and is satisfied; for the anticipated immortal harvest, waving throughout the world to His glory, fills His heart with joy! The portion of Old Testament Scripture that is most similar to this chapter is the beautiful 22nd Psalm – toward the close of which, it is predicted, “A seed shall serve him.” This is a declaration which is almost identical with the words of Isaiah: “he shall see his seed.” In both cases, the reference is to His spiritual offspring – those over whom He is yet to pronounce these joyful words on the Great Last Day: “Behold I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb. 2:13). Isaiah himself – in an earlier prediction, as we have previously noted – had spoken of Christ as “the everlasting Father” (chapter 9:6). And we cannot fail to see that this is a most appropriate title for Him, when we remember that the first Adam stood as the natural representative of the human race; and that Jesus, Who is spoken of as “the second Adam,” is the representative Father of the redeemed family which He is to gather out of every tribe and nation. In the imagery of the Shepherd-Psalm (which immediately follows the Passion-Psalm), He is the Shepherd-King Who gathers His ransomed flock around Him – causing them to lie down in green pastures, and leading them beside still waters.

(continued in Part 2)

ISAIAH 53 MAN OF SORROWS AND CONQUEROR OF DEATH! – PART 2

If we go to the New Testament, the Apostle's words form a most appropriate commentary upon the twofold representation that Isaiah has here given us – namely, the humiliation and exaltation of Christ; His sufferings and His victory; His cross and His crown. He, “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:6-11). We also have these words: “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). And finally, we have the most impressive commentary of all, in the beautiful simile of our blessed Lord Himself! When speaking of His death, He said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). In these words, He allows a picture from nature to simply but graphically unfold the mystery of His approaching sacrifice. He employs the metaphor of the seed-corn dropped into the ground, and the new and more exuberant growth springing from the apparent death and destruction of the planted seed. He, the true “Corn of wheat,” might indeed have “abode alone” in the heavenly granary. He might have declined the great act of self-sacrifice, and left the world and its billions of souls to their fate. He did not *need* any nations of redeemed people in order to augment His own independent happiness and glory. But thanks be to Him for His amazing love! The Divine Corn of wheat has fallen into the ground and died; and as a glorious consequence, “he shall see his seed!” That buried grain is bringing forth much fruit; it is germinating into a rich and abundant harvest for the garnerers of immortality. The eye of faith is carried forward to the world's great harvest-celebration, when the words of one of the oldest Messianic prophecies in Scripture shall have its glorious and complete fulfillment: “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be!” (Gen. 49:10) On the Great Last Day, Christ – our “everlasting Father” – shall have brought “many sons unto glory.” It is then that “he shall see of the travail of his soul,” and “be satisfied.”

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A description of the reproach and general rejection of Christ – verses 1-3
- ❖ A picture of the sufferings that He endured to redeem His people – verses 4-9
- ❖ The humiliation and subsequent exaltation of Christ are minutely described, as well as the blessings to mankind that flow from His death – verses 10-12

What a storehouse of wondrous consolation is contained in this remarkable chapter! With what wonderful feelings must its mysterious utterances have been read by the captive Jews on the banks of the Euphrates River! How it must have dried all tears, and hushed all misgivings, when their thoughts were thus directed to their Messiah Himself – as a mighty Fellow-sufferer! What were their tears of bondage, when compared with His? What were those years of loneliness and exile, compared with His lonely treading of the winepress of Jehovah's wrath? How it must have imparted a lofty consecration to their grief when they remembered that a Person was here revealed, Who was to participate in their deepest experiences of desolation! And on the other hand, the prophecies of His resurrection and triumph would be a pledge to them that the day was coming when their own chains would be broken, and when their city would rise from its ashes and ruins.

But what a source of unutterable solace this chapter still provides, even today, to the Lord's afflicted sons and daughters, who are still hanging their harps of sadness upon the willows, and refusing all earthly comfort! Let us remember that we are treading the very same pathway that our Savior did, and let us not forget that our Great Redeemer and Captain of our salvation was "made perfect" through sufferings that were far more intense than any that we shall ever be called to endure. What an example of meek and un murmuring resignation! The Lamb of God stood silently before His shearers, and did not open His mouth. With unfaltering steps, He pursued the path of appointed trial until He could exclaim, "It is finished!" In His case, that Cross led to glory; the result of His fierce soul-travail was the birth of a great universal Church, as well as His own enthronement as Lord of all! And since we are united with this once-suffering but now-living Lord, we shall most assuredly be brought at last to sit with Him upon His throne – just as He also overcame, and sat down with His Father upon His throne. Let all who are in a land of sorrowing exile listen to the heavenly strain, coming to their ears from the lips of Earth's greatest Sufferer: "'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people!' – for was there ever sorrow like unto My sorrow? And will you not be content to patiently bear your cross for Me, since I have endured such a cross for you? 'Comfort ye, comfort ye!' Here I give you the comfort of all comforts – namely, peace through the blood of My cross, and the pledge and assurance that I have cancelled your transgressions, since I Myself have endured their punishment. I have given My life as an offering for your sin!"

Lord, we hide our faces in sorrow, and confess that "all we like sheep have gone astray." But we thank You that You have mercifully laid our iniquity upon the shoulders of our Substitute! Amen.

