

A right assessment of Jesus

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Date: 30 May 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now to Isaiah and chapter 52 from verse 13.

Verse 13.

We can size people up sometimes. We're told, aren't we, we have that idiom, first impressions last. So make a good one. First impressions last. But sometimes we can be judgmental and we can evaluate others and size them up. We wouldn't admit it, but sometimes we can size people up and just get it wrong and be judgmental.

Sometimes we can get it completely wrong. I don't know why. It's a long time ago, but I was thinking of Subo, Susan Boyle, one of Scotland's most famous singers in recent years.

[1 : 24] And if you've got a good memory and you can remember way back to her first ever audition on Britain's Got Talent, the audience were kind of harsh and judging her even before she sang a note.

She was 47, unemployed. She was dressed very plainly, not in a glamorous way. And when she said, I just want to be like Elaine Page, the audience burst out laughing.

And then she started to sing. Do you remember that? She started to sing that amazing La Mis song, I Dreamed a Dream. And the audience were spellbound because they got it all wrong about Susan Boyle, as the 35 million YouTube hits later on told us.

So sometimes we can get it all wrong about people. I was thinking too of that great Tolkien novel, The Hobbit. Maybe you've read The Hobbit and the Wizard Gandalf proposes to the dwarves that Bilbo Baggins should be the thief.

He should be the burglar in their expedition. And the dwarves ridicule that idea and they just think, that's ridiculous. They look at this unusual creature, this hobbit, and they think he's just used to his own home comforts and he's so little and he seems useless.

[2 : 53] What good would a hobbit be in a dangerous adventure? And without too many spoilers, if you haven't read it, how wrong they were as they judged this creature, as they sized him up and assessed and evaluated him.

They were completely wrong. Sometimes we get it so wrong about people. And let's not be too quick to form opinions about other people.

Perhaps you've done that. And I'm sure I have. But remember that people are like icebergs. When you see an iceberg, 90% of the iceberg is under the water and you can't see it.

And sometimes we just judge people on a little bit of what we see. So, why am I talking about that?

Well, because when we come to Isaiah 52 and 53, which is the fourth servant song in Isaiah, we find that the Jewish people get it completely wrong about Jesus.

As they assess and evaluate the servant of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, they get it completely wrong. And many people today in Aberdeen in 2021, when they think about Jesus and who he is, and when they size him up and evaluate, is he important?

[4 : 22] Do I need him? Is he significant? Many people today don't see how significant Jesus is. They don't see how wonderful he is and how worthy of our praise and worship the Lord Jesus is.

They look at Jesus and they might consider him for a few moments and they get it all wrong.

Thankfully, many people change their minds about him when they become Christians.

And we trust, as we read in Isaiah 53 verse 1, that the arm of the Lord is powerful and strong to save. Before we focus on the wrong evaluation of Jesus and then the right evaluation in chapter 53, I want us just to consider the last few verses of chapter 52 first.

And so we have three headings. The first heading is Jesus' victory. The second heading is a wrong assessment of Jesus. And then finally, we'll see a right assessment of Jesus.

So that's where we're going. Jesus' victory. Then a wrong assessment of Jesus. And our final point, a right assessment of Jesus. So first of all then, verses 13 to 15 of chapter 52, Jesus' victory.

[5 : 54] We're giving a summary in these verses, these last few verses, an overview about what's to come throughout the rest of this fourth servant song.

And actually, the NIV heading is very good here, the suffering and glory of the servant. That's what it's about. But please have a look at verse 13 with me.

It says here, see, my servant will act wisely. And actually, a better translation would be, my servant will succeed.

My servant will succeed. And so straight away, in this fourth servant song, the victory of Jesus is prophesied by the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah wants us to know from the offset that this suffering servant is going to be victorious. Yes, he will be victorious. Yes, he will suffer terribly.

[6 : 56] Yes, other people will size him up and think he's unimportant. But he will be victorious. And we're told that straight away. And that means that for us today, as part of the worldwide church of Jesus Christ, we are something.

We are part of something which is ultimately victorious. And that's so encouraging. I've been preaching all the way through Daniel in our Sunday evening services recently.

And I've just loved that theme of the victory of the Lord Jesus and the kingdom of God. And Daniel, when the stone smashes into the statue and grows to become a huge mountain, filling the earth, the victory of the kingdom of God.

It's a stunning theme. So, who is this suffering yet glorious servant? Who is this suffering yet glorious servant? Well, we're given a clue in verse 13, where we read, he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

So, even though this servant is going to suffer so much and be evaluated and thought of as useless, he will be exalted. And he will be exalted highly.

[8 : 22] Does that remind you of anything in Isaiah? Can you hear the echoes? Back to Isaiah chapter 6 and verse 1, that famous verse, in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord highly exalted and seated on his throne, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Isaiah 57 verse 15, we have another verse talking about being highly exalted. For this is what the high and exalted one says, he who lives forever, whose name is holy.

And so, throughout Isaiah, the one who is highly exalted is the Lord, is God, is Yahweh. And so, this reminds us, at the start of this servant song, that the one who will be pierced, the one who will be crucified, is also the Lord God Almighty.

He's more than just a human figure, this servant of the Lord. The breathtaking fact is that this servant of the Lord is actually God himself.

That reminds me of a couple of hymns. Remember the hymn, The Servant King, and the wonderful lines in that hymn, stars that flung, hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails, surrendered.

[9 : 55] Hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails, surrendered. So, the one who created the world was the very same one who would come and suffer and die for us to rescue us.

And the older hymn, Who is he? On yonder tree died in pain and agony. Tis the Lord, O wondrous story, Tis the Lord, the Prince of Glory.

Please look down at verse 15, just the last verse of chapter 52. And again, we're still thinking about this theme of victory. And it says here, So he will sprinkle many nations, many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

For what they were not told, they will see. And what they have not heard, they will understand. So, who are these kings? And what is it they will see and understand?

Well, these kings are Gentile kings from all over the world. And Isaiah is making this amazing prophecy that one day, not just the kings, because they stand for the people and represent the people, but kings and those in their kingdom will come to put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 25] Because these are verbs of perception to see and to understand. And Isaiah uses them to speak of people becoming Christians, people being converted, people coming to faith.

And so actually, the very start of this servant song is immensely encouraging, because Isaiah prophesies the victory of the servant of the Lord.

Yes, verse 14, Jesus will be terribly disfigured on the cross. As he hangs on the cross, he'll be shattered, and he'll look anything but victorious as he's crucified.

But then later, many will come to see and understand why he died. The true significance of Jesus' work on the cross and through his death will come life for those who trust him.

And did this prophecy come true in Isaiah 52? Of course it did. Because as we fast forward thousands of years to today, surely we can say that kings and those in their kingdoms all over the world have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[12:45] We just think of the explosion of Christianity in huge parts of Africa and South America and South Korea and in China. And we can say, kings will shut their mouths because of him.

They'll be awestruck at what Jesus has done, dying, God coming to die for us. It's an awesome thing. And it's a costly victory.

And so in Aberdeen today, our prayer is that many will come to see and understand who Jesus really is.

Because we know there are tens of thousands of people in the city who spiritually don't know their right hand from their left. And so we pray and pray and pray that they will come to see themselves and the Lord Jesus as we really are and as he really is.

So we need to hold these strands together, the suffering of the servant and the victory of the servant. And Ivor was preaching recently on the verse from 2 Corinthians 5 here, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[14:11] Again, the suffering and the victory of Christ coming together. So that's the first point, Jesus' victory, the longest point. More briefly, let's move to the second and third points.

Secondly, a wrong assessment of Jesus. Moving to chapter 53 now, a wrong assessment of Jesus. Israel looks at Jesus and what does she see as she assesses Jesus?

Nothing special. They look at Jesus and they think he's nothing special. Verse 2, he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

Often we judge people by how they dress and what they wear. And Jesus just looked ordinary and he wasn't much taller or stronger than other people. He just looked like an ordinary guy.

There was nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. And they just thought he was unimpressive as they assess Jesus.

[15:17] And we see that in John 6, 41. So the Jews grumbled about him because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. And they said, it's not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know.

How does he now say I have come down from heaven? And so there was nothing that they saw in Jesus that impressed them at all. Again in verse 2, we read, he grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground.

What is this dry ground? Perhaps it's referring to the fact that Jesus grew up in Nazareth and they just thought that's a very unimpressive place.

A bit like where I grew up to be honest in Cumbernauld, winner of numerous carbuncle prizes and people think can anything good come from there? You can make your own minds about that.

But you know it's true of Nazareth back then because it was full of foreigners and the religious worship was diluted and so people compared it to Jerusalem and thought, Nazareth?

[16:31] You come from there? And they would look down on you if you came from Nazareth. But that's where Jesus grew up. I quite like that actually. And in verse 2 it says, he grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground.

Remember the words spoken about Jesus. Nazareth? Can anything good come from Nazareth?

But it wasn't just like they sized Jesus up and thought he was a nobody. It was worse than that because as we go on through the rest of this passage, verse 3, it says that Jesus was despised and held in low esteem.

They despised him. Verse 4, second half, we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

And so when people saw Jesus hanging on the cross, they were mocking and jeering and they looked at Jesus and they thought, he must have done something really wicked for God to allow this to happen to him.

[17:52] He must have been a great sinner as they sized Jesus up. He must have rebelled against Rome and insulted Rome.

He's getting what he deserves. Being crucified. a bit like Job's three friends and they're thinking that because of all Job's suffering, he must have done something wrong.

And you know, Job's three friends were wrong and these bystanders at the cross were wrong as they assess Jesus and think that he's suffering because of his own sin.

In fact, they get that so wrong, don't they? And so, that's the second heading. A wrong assessment of Jesus. They size Jesus up.

They think he's unimportant. He's a no one from an obscure place and he ends up getting crucified. But now we come to the last heading.

[18 : 55] A right assessment of Jesus. A right assessment of Jesus. Because some of these folks didn't remain blind in their understanding of who Jesus was and who they were and why Jesus died because God opened their eyes.

And so, when God opened their eyes, they were able to make a right evaluation of themselves and of Jesus. Because now they begin to understand through God's Spirit the truth of Jesus' suffering. Second half of verse 4. Let's see it together. What a wonderful and humbling verse this is. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering.

And so we discover that of course Jesus wasn't paying for his own sin on the cross. But he was paying for our sin as a loving substitute who died in our place taking our guilt and our shame.

And so, before they thought, he's getting what he deserves. But when God's Spirit works, he shows them the truth and it couldn't be more different, could it? He's getting what I deserve.

[20 : 20] And isn't that why we're in church this morning? To worship the Lord Jesus Christ. To thank him that this is so. And they understand themselves aright.

Verse 5, they understand their own condition, that they're the ones who deserve to be punished by God. And we understand that as Christians. We're the ones, Psalm 103, God doesn't treat us as our sins deserve.

He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

He was pierced. That word speaks of a deadly wound. And that's what happened to Jesus. He died for us. And he was crushed.

He was, as it were, ground to dust. Such was his suffering on the cross. Not only the physical suffering and the social suffering have been rejected, but the spiritual suffering as he was punished by his father for our sin.

[21 : 30] He was pierced. He was crushed. Why? We're told it was for our transgressions. And that word transgression means rebellion.

Rebellion against the king. God says we should do something and live a certain way in the Bible and we think we know better than God and we say, no, I'm just going to do my own thing.

I don't care that it says that in the Bible. I don't believe that part. I don't believe that. Or if we're not Christians yet, we might just think, well, I hear all this stuff about God, but I don't really need God and I'm just going to be the boss of my own life and make my own decisions.

And that's transgression. When we rebel against God, he should be the rightful king in our lives because he is the king, but rebellion is pushing the king away.

And it speaks of our iniquities. Iniquities means twistedness. That's what the word means. There's a twistedness in the hearts of human beings so that we sin all the time every day in every part of our lives.

[22 : 42] And so that's God's assessment of us. They were busy assessing the suffering servant, but we need to rather hear the assessment of God on our lives and that is that we have transgressed and that we are full of sin and iniquity.

Do you believe that, friends? Do you accept that about yourself? Well, I'm sure those of us who are believers will accept that.

We know that to be true. We know that as we often use that illustration, if there's a screen here and imagine all your worst thoughts, even from the last few weeks, just the thoughts you have about others that were wrong, imagine they were all projected on the screen for us all to see.

We'd probably all want to make a swift exit or just get up and leave right now. We'd be so ashamed, we'd be so embarrassed because of our sin.

Verse 5, the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. Only Jesus can bring us peace.

Without Jesus, there is no peace between human beings and God because of our sin.

[24 : 05] And so God here explains the cross. Here in Isaiah 53, God, through His prophet Isaiah, is explaining the whole heart of the Christian faith to us.

And He does so by talking about our sin, our rebellion, our need of a Savior, and by telling us of the one, the servant, who will come and take our place and pay the debt of our sin.

Because if it wasn't for my pride and my selfishness and my rudeness and my greed and my hypocrisy and all the things that are wrong with me and with us, then the cross wouldn't be necessary.

There'd be no need for Jesus to die. But it's our sin that held Him there. It's love, the love of Jesus that held Him to the cross because He was dying for us, for our sins.

Verse 6, we all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. Again, do you believe that about yourself?

[25 : 21] That we're like wandering sheep, wandering off, not God's way, but going our own way, doing our own thing, getting into danger, getting into all kinds of bother.

And a sheep that falls down and is cast can't right itself. It can't save itself. We're like sheep. But the good news is we have a Savior.

We have Jesus, the suffering servant. Verse 6, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Why was He crucified? It was for our transgressions. It was for our iniquities. He died in our place, in the place of sinners.

He wasn't getting what He deserved, and that's worth repeating. He was getting what we deserve. What a great and marvelous exchange.

[26 : 22] What an amazing swap that our sin was put on the shoulders of Jesus, and His righteousness was put on us.

And as we draw to a close, let's just see from verse 6 that all this was no accident. The cross was no accident, because it says that it was the Lord who laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Remember the scapegoat in Leviticus 16 and how the high priest would come and place his hands on that scapegoat and that goat would die in the place of the people.

As the priest confessed the sins of the nation on the goat and the goat died instead of Israel. And here it's as if God the Father is placing His hands on Jesus and Jesus is that scapegoat and Jesus dies in the place of His people.

And so it's Jesus who dies instead of us. What did it cost Jesus to save us? He had to pay the enormous debt of sin of all His people.

[27 : 52] He had to be forsaken. He had to experience the white hot anger of His Father towards sin. And yet He did that for us as Paul says the Son who loved me and gave Himself for me.

God sees things perfectly doesn't He? God sees everything perfectly and as He assesses us He says that we're sinners and we need to be saved.

Do you agree with God's assessment? But let me end by saying what's your assessment of Jesus? Don't make the mistake of those in the beginning of our passage who made a wrong assessment of Jesus who thought He was no one, who thought He was an insignificant guy from an insignificant place and they shrugged their shoulders and rejected the only one who could save them and bring eternal life.

Don't make a wrong assessment of Jesus if you're not a Christian yet here or you're not a Christian and you're watching online. Don't make that same mistake. Rather, pray that God would open your eyes so that you can see yourself aright and see Jesus aright.

The suffering servant of the Lord, is He your Savior? My prayer is that for everyone here and everyone watching, you'll be able to say, yes, He is the one who died for me.

[29 : 32] Let's pray. Almighty God, our loving Father in Heaven, we thank You that He was crushed for our iniquities.

We pray that as we've considered these things this morning, that our love for the Lord Jesus Christ would grow and increase. and that as it grows, that we would be compelled by Your love for us to live lives for You, to live lives to please You.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.