

Lesson 5 | January 3, 2021

God's Suffering Servant

Study Text: Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12

Central Truth: God the Father's exaltation of Jesus showed His approval of Jesus' substitutionary death.

Key Verse: Isaiah 53:5

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (KJV).

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand that Jesus' identity as both fully God and fully man made possible His uniquely sinless life and sacrificial death, as well as His supernatural resurrection.
- Explore Jesus' example of love and humble sacrifice as a model for daily living.
- Commit to daily service to God and seek His empowerment.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Approximately seven centuries before the coming of Christ, Isaiah penned words that would accurately describe the suffering Jesus would endure in order to bring salvation to disobedient humanity. (***Play the video on the Suffering Servant, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.***)

Opening Activity—War Memorials

Ask: *What famous battlefields or war memorials have you visited? Did the location depict the agony of human suffering that happened there? Explain. Why was this depiction insufficient to fully capture the agony and horror of this place?* Most students will respond that even if the site depicts the suffering, it cannot fully capture what has taken place there.

Say: **National battlefields can describe historical events, but they can never enable visitors to actually experience the sights, sounds, smells, and suffering of the battle. Isaiah was extremely accurate in his prophecy of the Suffering Servant, and the Gospel writers described the event in some detail, but we can never truly understand what Jesus did for us.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

By some estimates, Mel Gibson's 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ* is the most successful Christian-themed film in history. Using inflation-adjusted data, it earned more than \$600 million in worldwide revenue. Audiences were shocked at the film's brutal depiction of Jesus' scourging and crucifixion. Yet no film can capture the true extent of Jesus' sacrifice for humanity's sin, and our understanding of His torturous death must move beyond gore to glory, particularly the glory God desires to receive through our lives as earthly reflections of His Son.

Part 1—Despised and Rejected Exalted by God

Isaiah 52:13–15

[Isa 52:13-15 KJV] 13 Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. 14 As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: 15 So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for [that] which had not been told them shall they see; and [that] which they had not heard shall they consider.

Say: Isaiah paints a picture of Jesus as the Suffering Servant, taking the sins of the world while experiencing an excruciating death. Yet, His death was not the end of the story, for it **looked forward to the exaltation He would receive when He ascended to His Father.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

One of the most compelling paradoxes in Jesus' earthly life and mission is His commitment to fully serve the Father even as He maintains His identity as God himself. While Jesus was equal with His Father, He was eager to carry out is mission on the Cross. This, in short, reminds us of the struggle inherent within our attempts to understand the Trinity. The Gospels' repeated distinction between God the Father and God the Son help us by pointing us toward the earthly parallel of an authoritative father and obedient son. **But the extent to which Jesus followed His Father even while He was fully God is beyond our understanding. Yet, a hint of this had been in place in Isaiah's writings centuries before Jesus was born.**

The Suffering Servant narrative in Isaiah points to Jesus' commitment to give himself up on behalf of lost humanity, but to receive His exaltation in so doing. In Isaiah 52:13, the prophet pointed first to the resulting exaltation.

God's Servant would be raised up and exalted. But that expression also alludes to Jesus being physically raised up on a cross. Verse 14 then further alludes to the

extreme manner in which Jesus would be disfigured. **Verse 15 goes on to say that God's Servant would sprinkle the nations. In other words, the shed blood of Christ would be sprinkled for the redemption of all who would believe. God's Servant will be exalted above all earthly kings; the imagery of earthly kings shutting their mouths illustrates this truth. But this picture of God's Servant being a King over kings is brought into focus with clear allusions to the Crucifixion. Exaltation and self-sacrifice come together in this passage.**

Discuss

? What expressions in Isaiah 52:13–15 point toward Jesus' sacrifice even as the verses announce His exaltation?

? How do your attitudes and priorities reflect Christ's example in sacrifice?

Rejected by Humanity

Isaiah 53:1–3

[Isa 53:1-12 KJV] 1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? 2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, [there is] no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were [our] faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Say: Isaiah's prophecy foretold the coming of the Messiah. The Jews of Jesus' day, living under the oppression of the Roman Empire, were actively looking for that Messiah, but when He came into their cities and villages, many of them rejected Him. **He did not fulfill their preconceived notions of who the Messiah would be. (Humanity has many preconceived notions about salvation.)** Yet, there were those who received Him, just as people receive Him today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 53 opens with a key question: "Who has believed?" (verse 1, NIV). There is a note of incredulity in this verse over the self-sacrifice of God's Servant. That questioning voice reflects the response of people everywhere and through all time to the claims of the gospel.

The second half of verse 1 uses symbolic imagery to make it clear that the lost can never satisfactorily answer their questions by relying on their own wisdom. Such requires the intervention of the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ. **Jesus is the full expression of God's Person and power; He is truly "the arm of the Lord." Only through the**

work of the Spirit can that arm be revealed, which takes place through the Word of God proclaimed and applied.

Contrasts continue in the description of God's Servant. That the Servant grows up (verse 2) points to Jesus' entire earthly life. The cross and resurrection came after a life that intimately connected the Savior with human experience. Jesus grew up in humble circumstances. While there were certainly miraculous elements to identify His birth as the spectacular breaking in of the divine into our world, **His birth, childhood, and young adulthood leading to His ministry were much like any other Jewish boy of that time.**

When Jesus did begin to attract attention through His public ministry and miracles, there was no widespread rush within the society of His day to embrace Him. Many, such as the disciples and other godly followers mentioned in the Gospels, would take to heart the truth Jesus proclaimed. But many others would reject Him (verse 3). The world at large would fail to see Jesus for who He is, and would instead be blinded by the humility and simplicity of His appearance and actions.

Jesus' identification with sorrow and suffering connected Him with the very things people naturally want to avoid. And yet, His embrace of this world's pain was a necessary part of His mission to defeat all suffering for all time.

Resource Packet Item 1: What's Really Important?

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups. Assign one of the three sections of the sheet to each small group, and give them a few minutes to read the passages and answer the questions. Then ask the groups to report their responses to the rest of the class.

Discuss

? Before you accepted Christ, what was your first response to the gospel?

? What kinds of doubting questions have you encountered from others when sharing your faith?

Part 2—Wounded for Our Transgressions He Bore Our Sin and Suffering

Isaiah 53:4–6

[Isa 53:4-6 KJV] 4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he [was] wounded for our transgressions, [he was] bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace [was] upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone

astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Say: What are some examples of benefits you have received from someone else's sacrifice? *(Give opportunity for a few students to share. Examples may include a college education made possible by their parents' sacrifice or freedom protected by service personnel.)* Jesus made the greatest sacrifice when He took the sins of rebellious humanity to make reconciliation with God possible. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

A strong contrast presents itself in Isaiah 53:4. Jesus obediently went to the cross on behalf of sinful humanity, but those present at His crucifixion condemned Him as if He were guilty of His own sin before God. **Moving beyond the audience at the place of His crucifixion, this verse also reminds us of a more general human reaction to the Cross, as well as to all evil. People do not naturally see evil in themselves, and they are often too quick to acknowledge the guilt they perceive in others.**

Verses 5–6 dismiss any self-deceiving self-approval to which we might cling. **Clearly, Jesus did not suffer and die for any crime He committed against anyone; He lived a perfect life. Rather, His wounds and pain were a direct result of humanity's sins. The collective, repeated pronoun "our" in verse 5 points to the personal debt of sin carried by every person who has ever lived or will live until God chooses to conclude the history of this world. Verse 6 leaves no one out of this classification. All of us have gone astray from the divinely planned life of holiness for which we were created. All of us have done so willingly, in purposeful rebellion against God. Yet, God's response has been to redirect the punishment we deserve and place it on the Son of God.**

Isaiah 53:5–6 is not just referring to the pain and suffering we avoided because Christ was willing to bear them. **A further contrast comes to light when we consider the blessings the prophet connects with our lives as a result of Christ's suffering. The punishment Christ endured brought us peace. The wounds He suffered brought us healing.**

Discuss

? What is your reaction when you read a news story of someone convicted of a brutal murder or other heinous crime?

? Do you find yourself classifying convicted criminals, or people who exhibit violent or self-destructive behavior, as spiritually more needy than yourself? What would be a better response?

He Died Willingly

Isaiah 53:7–9

[Isa 53:7-9 KJV] 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. 9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither [was any] deceit in his mouth.

Say: Isaiah's prophecy in these verses was fulfilled when the sinless Son of God came to earth for the purpose of giving His life for the sins of humanity. He did not try to defend himself, nor did He call for the destruction of His enemies. Instead, He loved them and gave His life, even for them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 53:7 speaks prophetically of Jesus not opening His mouth in protest or in His own defense when He was oppressed, afflicted, and led to His death. This silence tells us much, given that He was unjustly condemned.

Whether Jesus was healing the sick, raising the dead, multiplying food to feed thousands, calming the Sea of Galilee in the midst of a violent storm, or allowing a horde of demons from a possessed man to go into a herd of pigs, He did so with words. As God, He possessed such boundless power that His spoken commands could accomplish anything He desired. It is helpful to reflect on John 1 and recall that Jesus, the divine Word, is Creator of everything in the universe. On a smaller scale astounding miracles were brought about throughout Jesus' public ministry leading up to His arrest and crucifixion. Jesus' silence, then, is an act of great restraint. He refused to overcome His torturers and executioners, even though He could have easily brought help and deliverance simply through His authoritative word.

Verses 8–9 focus on the immediate consequences of Jesus' self-sacrifice. The oppressive judgment He suffered resulted in His capital punishment. He was executed even though **He was an innocent Man—executed for the sins of others. He experienced the death of a criminal, between two criminals.**

And yet, within the announcement of Jesus' grave in verse 9, a hint emerges that points to the fuller picture of His vindication and victory that will emerge in the verses to follow. The grave of Jesus would be that of the rich. That detail would play out with the new tomb donated by the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea (see Matthew 27:57–60). But this fulfilled prophecy would become one point among many to announce a glorious, risen Savior.

Resource Packet Item 2: The Mind of Christ

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to read the Scriptures and respond, either individually or in small groups. Then ask several volunteers to share their responses.

Discuss

? What are some common features in Jesus' miracles during His ministry?

? Why can we find hope amid the brutal description of Christ's death?

Part 3—Bruised and Exalted by God He Suffered in Obedience to the Father

Isaiah 53:10–11

[Isa 53:10-11 KJV] 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put [him] to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see [his] seed, he shall prolong [his] days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, [and] shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Say: Parents will do everything they can to keep their child from suffering. Yet God the Father loved humanity so much that He gave His Son to die on the cross for our sin—a sacrifice that God himself had ordained from the beginning (see Revelation 13:8). **It should be noted, sometimes our efforts to protect our children from suffering cause more harm than good.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christ's suffering in obedience to His Father, as described in Isaiah 53:10, gives us profound evidence of how deeply we are loved by the Heavenly Father. As Jesus said in **John 3:16, God so loved this sinful world that He gave His Son. That gift included God sending Jesus into the world in human flesh, then Jesus suffering a horrible death. His suffering was a loving sacrifice made by God himself so that we could be forgiven and restored to Him as His children. Verse 10 makes the statement that it was God's will for Christ to become a sacrificial offering for us. Yet we must keep in mind that God acted out of love for us.**

Sometimes the attention we give to Christ's suffering and death, while important, creates too high an emphasis on suffering and death in our own lives. **Although Jesus told us to take up our own cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24–26), this is largely a call to separation from sin in order to embark on a discipleship journey of ever-increasing personal holiness as we draw closer to our Savior. The idea behind carrying our own cross is that we die to selfishness and sinful practices—the old life—so that we can take hold of the new life afforded to us through Christ.**

This emphasis on new life comes into view in Isaiah 53:10–11. Verse 10 transitions from a picture of Christ’s death as an offering for humanity to an announcement that Christ will see His own descendants. **Psalm 22:30 can help us better understand this statement: Even though He will die, and even be regarded as being among the wicked, future generations will be told about Him, and the will of the Lord will continue to be enacted through Him. Furthermore, verse 11 connects a risen Savior with “the light of life.” All of this reminds us that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and His work on the cross was part of an eternal plan.**

[Psa 22:29-31 KJV] 29 All [they that be] fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. **30 A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.** 31 They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done [this].

Discuss

? What might the sacrificial death of Jesus teach us about His will for our lives?

? How does God continue to demonstrate His love in the lives of believers?

Jesus Won the Victory

Isaiah 53:12

[Isa 53:12 KJV] 12 Therefore will I divide him [a portion] with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Say: Jesus was victorious over death, and He is now seated at the right hand of the Father where He is interceding for us. Romans 8:34 says, “Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 53:12 encompasses a great deal of truth. Because of His obedient sacrifice, Jesus has received a reward that will be shared with all who put their trust in Him. The language is that of a victory celebration following a battle. **Jesus is the One who is truly and supremely great and possesses infinite divine strength. He is given a portion “among the great” and divides the spoils “with the strong” (NIV).** In Old Testament times, a victorious leader would take the possessions that had been captured through the course of battle and divide them among those who had participated in the battle. This was called the “spoils” of war. **In verse 12, Isaiah used such terminology in reference to the Suffering Servant—Jesus. Because of His**

willingness to die for many, Christ would receive the spoils of the victor, redeeming many through His sacrificial death.

As a result, verse 12 calls us, and all of God's people, to solemnly acknowledge what Jesus has done for us—acknowledgment that should take the form of worshipful words as well as a lifestyle that honors Him. **Christ poured out His very life on our behalf. He was humbled to the extent that He was identified as, or numbered among, those who have transgressed God's laws. He bore our sin on the cross. And now, He continually intercedes for us before the throne of God. His actions, the actions of a loving servant, are altogether worthy of our devotion and praise.**

Resource Packet Item 3: Who Gets The Credit?

Distribute the work sheet and encourage students to take it home and prayerfully work through it in the following week.

Discuss

? Why is it important to remember that Christ is our Source for anything that might come of our lives?

? What is the appropriate response to the spiritual victory we have in Christ?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Reexamining fundamental concepts that form the basis of the Christian faith—Christ's life, death and resurrection—can sometimes lull believers into a false sense of familiarity. After all, these truths receive a great deal of attention at Christmas, Easter, and throughout the year. But the move from “head knowledge” to “heart commitment” and then to daily enactment is a lifelong process in every believer's life. Use today's study to reflect upon Christ's sacrifice. We should focus on how transformed our lives can become when we put our faith in our risen Savior.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Look for ways to reflect the attitudes of Jesus to others this week.
- Encourage a fellow believer to rejoice in God's love.
- Pray for opportunities to share Jesus with an unbeliever.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Jesus Betrayed and Arrested.

Matthew 26:47–56

[Mat 26:47-56 KJV] 47 And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. 49 And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. 50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend,

wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. 51 And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out [his] hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. 52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. 53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? 55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. 56 But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

Tuesday:

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin.

Mark 14:53,55–65

[Mar 14:53, 55-65 KJV] 53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. ... 55 And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. 56 For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. 57 And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, 58 We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. 59 But neither so did their witness agree together. 60 And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what [is it which] these witness against thee? 61 But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? 62 And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. 63 Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? 64 Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. 65 And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.

Wednesday:

Jesus Mocked by the Romans.

Mark 15:16–20

[Mar 15:16-20 KJV] 16 And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band. 17 And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his [head], 18 And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! 19 And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing [their] knees worshipped him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

Thursday:

Jesus Crucified.
John 19:17–25

[Jhn 19:17-25 KJV] 17 And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called [the place] of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: 18 Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. 19 And Pilate wrote a title, and put [it] on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, [and] Greek, [and] Latin. 21 Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. 22 Pilate answered, What I have written I have written. 23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also [his] coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. 24 They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. 25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the [wife] of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

Friday:

Jesus Insulted on the Cross.
Matthew 27:38–43

[Mat 27:38-43 KJV] 38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. 39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, 40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest [it] in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. 41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking [him], with the scribes and elders, said, 42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. 43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

Saturday:

Jesus Died on the Cross.
Luke 23:44–48

[Luk 23:44-48 KJV] 44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. 46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. 47 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. 48 And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.