

Lesson 91 - CHRIST, OUR VICTORIOUS SUBSTITUTE (1) *Isaiah 53:1-9*

(Isa. 53:1) - *“Who hath believed our report?”* - Isaiah was called by the Lord to be one of His prophets to speak the Word of God to the people. His main message was the promise of eternal salvation for God’s elect, Jew and Gentile, that would be accomplished and secured by the Messiah in His death and resurrection as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God’s people. Isaiah preached the Gospel of God’s grace found only in the glorious Person and finished work of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah (*Isa. 9:6-7*). Isaiah’s message to the people was that they should not look to themselves nor their works for salvation. They should look to the God of all grace who promises salvation to all who believe in this Messiah and who look forward to His coming. Isaiah’s *“report”* (message, doctrine, announcement) was the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel by Jesus Christ the Lord.

When the Lord called Isaiah, He told him that the majority of the nation would not believe him (*Isa. 6:8-13*). By nature, men will not believe in Christ (*Rom. 3:10-12; 1 Cor. 2:14*). So, the prophet asked, *“to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed.”* The *“arm of the Lord”* is a symbol for God’s power to save His people and bring them to faith in Christ. It takes the power of God to reveal the truth to sinners and make us willing to believe (*John 1:11-13; 6:44-45; Rom. 1:16-17*). God told Isaiah that even though the number of the people would be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant would be saved (*Isa. 1:9; 10:20-34*). The fact that God would be merciful to any sinner was to be an encouragement for all who heard the Gospel to believe it. The following verses describe how the Messiah would save His people.

(Isa. 53:2-3) - The Messiah would be God manifest in the flesh (*Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7*). This union of the two natures of Christ (deity and sinless humanity) was necessary for Him to save His people (*Heb. 2:14-18*). Having been made their Surety, having their sin-debt imputed to Him, He had to be made flesh, made under the law, to die for their sins and bring forth the righteousness of God by which they are justified. *“Tender plant”* describes the natural infirmities of His humanity without sin. *“Root out of dry ground”* reveals the condition of David’s house (from whom whose seed He came - *Rom. 1:3-4*) and the nation of Israel at the time of His birth. *“No form ... no comeliness ... no beauty”* all describe His outward appearance and shows that salvation is not by sight but by faith in Him (*2 Cor. 5:16*). *“Despised and rejected of men”* shows the spiritual deadness and depravity of all of us by nature (*John 1:11; Eph. 2:1-3*). It was the light of His message for which men hated Him (*John 3:19-20*). *“A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”* - Christ knew and experienced the infirmities and sufferings of the flesh without sin (*Heb. 4:15*), and He suffered the sorrows and griefs of dying for our sins imputed to Him.

“And we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not” - Again, this is the response of all of us by nature. Left to ourselves and our own natural wills, we turn away from Christ and count Him as one who is loathsome and repugnant in our sight. By nature, we hold Him in contempt and place no value upon His Person or His work. It takes a sovereign and powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth to bring us to believe in, value, and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Isa. 53:4-6) - Christ gave His life for His sheep (*John 10:11-18*). *“Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows”* - Having been made sin for us, meaning our sins imputed to Him (*2 Cor. 5:21a*), He had to bear our pain and suffering. It was not for Himself that He suffered unto death. It was for His people, sinners, whom the Father had given Him. He had no sin, and He knew no sin in Himself. He was (and is) our Substitute and Redeemer. *“Yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted”* - The unbelieving Jews, as all of us by nature, looked upon all His sorrows and troubles in life, and at death, as the just judgment of

God upon Him for some gross sins of which He Himself had been guilty. But He is the spotless Lamb of God Who suffered as the innocent sacrifice for the sins of His people imputed to Him. And though He was under the just judgment of God, it was not for His own sins but for the sins of His people - *“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.”*

“The chastisement of our peace was upon Him” - This speaks of our justification based on His righteousness imputed to us. The punishment required under God’s justice that would bring peace between God and sinners was upon Him (2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:19-22). *“With His stripes we are healed”* - By His death, our sins are purged away, and we are given spiritual life (John 17:1-5). God is reconciled, the debt is paid, justice is satisfied. He reconciled us to God by His death (2 Cor. 5:19-21).

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” - This is the lost state of all of God’s elect, fallen in Adam and born spiritually dead. This describes the lost *“SHEEP,”* God’s elect who are born lost and cannot find their way. The Good Shepherd has to come and get us, bring us back into the fold and keep us from straying (Luke 15:1-7). We have all *“gone astray”* and turned to our *“own way”* which is the way of salvation by the works and wills of men. But before the foundation of the world, God chose to save His elect, a remnant according to the election of grace. And the ground upon which He saves us is the merits of Christ’s righteousness imputed. To accomplish this righteousness, *“the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”* This the language of imputation and substitution. The Lord imputed the sins of His elect to Christ and imputed the righteousness of Christ to them (Psa. 32:1-2; Rom. 4:6-8; 2 Cor. 5:21). This is God’s way of salvation in Christ (John 14:6).

(Isa. 53:7-9) - These verses speak of Christ’s actual experience of suffering unto death for the sins of His people. *“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted”* - There is no way that we can adequately describe the pain and agony Christ went through because of our sins charged to His account. God’s justice, finding the sins of His elect on Christ, laid on Him by imputation, and voluntarily received by Him, demanded satisfaction from Him. He, being the Surety of His people, was responsible for them, and did answer for them by accomplishing the satisfaction demanded by the justice of God. The debt they owed was made His own. The payment of it was called for, and He accordingly answered. He paid the whole of it and cancelled the debt. He drank damnation dry. The punishment of the sins of His people was exacted on Him, and He submitted willingly to bear it. He bore it in His own body on the tree. This clearly expresses the doctrine of Christ’s satisfaction, which is propitiation (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

“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” - This shows that Christ was a willing Redeemer (John 10:14-18). Though He spoke glorious words on the cross, during His trial and His crucifixion He did not speak to defend Himself. The judgments of sinful men against Him were wrong and unjust, but the judgment of the Father against Him was just and true because of the sins of His sheep imputed to Him. This is why the doctrine of imputation is so important. Christ died *“the JUST for the unjust”* (1 Pet. 3:18), but God was just in punishing His sinless Son, all based on the sins of His elect imputed to Him. God did not pervert justice when He punished Christ in the place of His people.

“He was taken from prison and from judgment” - His life was taken away in a violent manner, under a pretense of justice, but men wrongfully accused Him. All of the events of Christ’s death were by the sovereign predestined decree of God. God meant it for His glory and the good of His people, but sinful men meant it for evil - *“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain”* (Acts 2:23; cf. 4:26-28).