

Title: Amazing Love, How can it Be?
Text: Isaiah 52.13-53.3
Theme: The surprising ministry of the Servant
Series: Isaiah #44
Prop Stmnt. Only the broken can ever be made whole.

This is a very difficult text to preach because it is truly overwhelming. What you are about to hear, is for most of you, not new. Most of you are familiar with the accounts of the life and death of Christ. You know that he died as a condemned criminal (around 30AD) in a form of public execution called crucifixion that was developed and used because it was able to prolong the torture for an inordinate amount of time, sometimes even days. Death by hanging, by beheading was much faster and frankly, easier. But, crucifixion was not used because of convenience. It was anything but. It was intentionally gruesome, gory, repulsive, humiliating and slow; excruciatingly slow. Our word, excruciating comes from this form of execution. It literally means - "out of crucifying." Crucifixion represented the absolute worst end to life that you could ever imagine. The person, who died this way, was considered to be the most vile and condemned being possible. Here was an attempt to inflict the greatest amount of pain, over the greatest amount of time in the most publicly humiliating manner possible. And here, in this text, 700 years before Christ is born, and at least 1-200 years before this form of execution is developed, Isaiah writes about it.

In the second half of his book (40-66) Isaiah is attempting to prepare Judah for the exile (judgment) because of their rebellion, against God. He is telling them that this is not the end. There is hope, even in the midst of judgment, if they will finally look to God in faith. This theme of hope, even in judgment, is championed by Isaiah because as he has been saying over and over and over throughout this - our God saves! And now, he is showing that our God saves, even through judgment. In fact, Judah, and people from all over the world for that matter, are going to be saved, and can only be saved by the Servant whom God sends to rescue them. This Servant who comes will himself be saved through judgment. That is what this 4th song of the Servant is about. The Servant who is coming to save Judah, is going to save Judah, and all others who believe in Him, because He is going to be condemned. He is going to die. He is going to carry our sin. He is going to bear our punishment. He is going to take our place. He is going to stand condemned as a substitute for me and he will literally, physically die so that I do not have to bear the just consequences for my sin. The death and resurrection of Christ cross is the greatest event in the history of the world and sets the stage for his exaltation and triumphant return in glory. All of history is about this. God planned it. He predicted it. He carried it out. But, not like we thought. Oh no! Isaiah 55.8-9 This text is full of astonishment, amazement and surprise. May God amaze us and awaken us with a fresh vision of the glory of his grace.

Read Text:

The accomplishment of our salvation...

I. ...comes through the road of astonishing disfigurement (52:13-15)

Our text begins with the word, "behold." (42.1) Look at this! Take great pains to pay attention and seek to grasp this. Please, do not miss this. Look long and hard at this and get it fixed firmly

and permanently into your mind...

A. The servant will succeed. (52.13a) *my servant shall act wisely*

This phrase means that he will accomplish what he sets out to do. He will be successful. In spite of what he looks like, in spite of what happens to him, in spite of what is said to him and about him, the servant will succeed in accomplishing our salvation. It is essential to understand this at the beginning otherwise, you would never know it. This is critical to get firmly established in your mind, because what you are about to read is going to make you think that there is no way that this is ever going to turn out good. The second half of the verse is very explicit about this. He shall be high and lifted up and exalted.

B. The servant is God. (52.13b) *he shall be high and lifted up*

These words, "high and lifted up" are used in three other places in Isaiah, where they refer to God (Yahweh) 6.1; 33.10 and 57.15. When Isaiah spoke of his vision of God who was high and lifted up, seated on a throne, whose robe and glory filled the temple, who was the object of worship and praise in chapter 6, he was speaking of Christ. This is confirmed in John 12.41. At time that we studied that text I pointed out that the use of the name Yahweh, is undeniably the covenant name that God uses with his people. Yahweh is high and lifted up. This is repeated in Isaiah 33.10. In Isaiah 57.15, we read, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:..." Again, the one who is high and lifted up is a clear reference to God. Therefore, the Servant who is successful is God and shall be exalted. His exaltation to being high and lifted up however, comes as a result of suffering. This is where the astonishment sets in. We are not only astonished at what happens to him, but we are astonished at who it happens to and we are astonished at what happens as a result.

C. The servant will suffer (52 14)

Look closely now at v.14. "As many as were astonished at you". They are shaking their heads in disbelief. The servant will suffer. Do you see the link between 13 and 14? No one will be exalted like the Servant, because no one will suffer like the Servant. The whole thing is astonishing, not the least of which is how the servant suffers. The last portion of chapter 51 speaks of the cup of wrath that God pours out against sin. Last week we considered how Christ in the garden of Gethsemane took this cup for every single person who would ever believe in him. We tried to imagine what the holy Son of God endured in his soul as he was counted as if he had committed our sin. Verse 14 speaks of the physical suffering of Christ. Would you quietly and slowly read this verse?

I could give you a detailed description of why Isaiah wrote this and what actually happens to a person's body when dying by means of crucifixion. This much is clear. Most of the pictures of Christ hanging on the cross are not accurate. They do not reveal the hideous nature and the grotesque disfigurement that this sort of punishment produces. I think that if we were to actually see a crucifixion, most of us would get sick to our stomachs. This verse says that as a result of his punishment, he did not even look human. It was astonishing!

D. His suffering accomplishes our cleansing (52 15a)

But there is something else astonishing about this. *"So shall he sprinkle many nations"*. In many translations there is a footnote next to this word because the Hebrew word "sprinkle" is the Arabic word "startle." A number of translators think that *startle* is what was intended because it fits with the flow, (read 14-15) However, I agree with leaving it as *sprinkle* because it is not only what the word means, but I would argue that it also fits with the meaning of the previous verse. The word "sprinkle" is used to describe what is done with the blood of the sacrifices that were offered in the OT system. The blood was sprinkled on veil, and other places as an act of consecration. But, the word can also mean more than that. It can also mean to splatter. So to, the violent death of Christ was astonishing, not only for its gruesomeness, but, it was this violent death that resulted in the sprinkling of his blood on many nations. This is graphic language and it is describing a very violent and gruesome scene. The violence that is poured out upon Christ resulted in the splattering of his blood. But, it is this splattering, this sprinkling, and this violent death that is the absorption of the punishment that we, the people of the nations, deserve.

Now, stop and consider this for a minute. What do you feel when you are sinned against and betrayed? Do you not have this sense of indignation? Do you not burn with fury that someone needs to pay for this? If so, how much do they need to pay until you are satisfied? But, what if you are the one who is the sinner? What if you have let other people down? What if you have failed? What if you cannot get the grades, keep the job, pay your bills, be successful, make people proud, be responsible, get the life you wanted, please your family, get the boyfriend, keep the relationship, gain the respect and attention that you crave? What then? What do you want to do to others or to yourself when you fail? How many of you know people who punish themselves by starving, by cutting, by inflicting pain on themselves? What are they doing? They are trying to suffer for their sins. If so, how much do you need to suffer, how much pain do you have to inflict upon yourself and others until it is enough? How much do you need to suffer until it has made it all better? Your suffering does not work! Christ's suffering does! It is already done. In my place condemned, he stood. Sealed my pardon with his blood! Trust him! Trust him and stop punishing yourself and acting as if Christ is not enough. Stop punishing others and acting as if Christ is not enough.

That is the point of this phrase. Through the death of the Servant, people from all over the world will have their sins forgiven. The Servant is not just for Judah, he is the Savior of the world. That is astonishing to realize, This Servant, this lowly, unpretentious One, born in a manger, who walked the back roads of Israel with a bunch of two and three time losers is the Savior, the sacrifice, the offering for the sins of people from all over the world. In fact, "kings shall shut their mouths because of him."

E. His suffering startles the nations (52 15b)

Why are the kings speechless? Is Isaiah saying that they are speechless because they see the Servant exalted as King and their own sense of greatness is now obliterated in view of his glory? That could be. But, I don't think that is the best way to take this. I believe, that His suffering startles the Kings and the nations because it never dawned on them that so much could accomplished through humiliation and suffering! That is not how kings and nations think. We think that through power, strength, military victory, wealth and pageantry that we

can impress the world and advance our agenda. Along comes the Servant, the King, who is humiliated, who suffers, who lays down his life and dies for his own, and in so doing he accomplishes what no king in history has ever done. He secures the eternal salvation of every single person in his Kingdom and secures a Kingdom that will never, ever end.

Who would ever believe that? Isaiah builds on that in the second 3-verse section. The accomplishment of our salvation was not only secured through astonishing disfigurement, but it

II. ...comes through the road of intense rejection. (53.1-3)

A. He makes no sense to us. (53.1)

How has God revealed his mighty arm? How does God show off his muscles? How does God How does God carry out salvation? It is not through might as we think. His ways are not our ways. He saves through death. He exalts through suffering. He rescues through judgment. He secures our redemption through rejection. This Servant pulls off a rescue operation that no human could have or would have ever conceived. Clearly the time of momentum and anticipation in the public ministry of Christ was the week of Passover. Christ is coming to Jerusalem, and on the 1st day of the week, when the nation has gathered at the city, with many living on the terrain outside the walls, here comes the King. But wait, he is riding a donkey! What kind of a king rides a donkey? But, this is what God said would happen, Zechariah 9.9. *"Your king is coming to you righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, (even) the foal of a donkey."*

Now, hold the phone for a minute. In a few months, perhaps by December, we are going to begin a Sunday morning study through Matthew. Isaiah is preparing us for Matthew writes with a goal to help us see that Jesus Christ is the King who fulfills all of the OT prophecies. So, in the very first public sermon that Matthew records, he quotes Jesus as saying at the very beginning of his first sermon, these words. Are you ready? Here is first campaign speech. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Blessed are the losers! Blessed are the broken! Blessed are the rejected, the scorned and the despised, because those are the only kind of people who will ever be part of my kingdom. Because at the head of this kingdom is the King who was the most humble, the most despised, the most broken, the most rejected and the most scorned. But it was in his rejection, he was able to secure an acceptance, a salvation, forgiveness, a home, which will never be taken away. It is so powerful it can never be defeated. It can never be stopped.

The arm of the Lord was revealed through what people thought was the weakest of men. His ways are not your ways.

B. He does not look the part. (53.2)

We live in a nation that obsesses about trivia and irrelevance. If you are part of a political campaign, there is so much time that is spent on image and staging. How much did Michele Obama spend on her dress? Who designed Ann Romney's clothes? What tie did the president wear? What is the demographic make-up of the people who stand behind Mitt Romney in a speech? Do you think that anyone with crooked teeth could get elected as president? This is not

new. People who are attractive and who have a personal impressiveness about them are able to draw others and get them to bend their will to their own. Here is Christ described as someone who would over looked in a crowd. He does not stand out. There was nothing particularly attractive about him. He was a plain looking person. He would not be voted as the most likely to succeed, he would more than likely not even be remembered much at all. You get that sense, again from Matthew's gospel, where (13.54-58) Christ goes into the synagogue of his hometown and reads a passage from Isaiah (61) to them. They impressed, rather shocked that this guy reads so well. He tells them that he is the one whom Isaiah was writing about. And they are shocked, just like Isaiah said they would be. They say stuff like "You're the carpenter's son!" Your brothers and sisters are here. It's like they do not even know his name. He grew up right there in their midst and they completely missed who he was, and when he told them, they were offended by him, rejected him, drove him out of town and tried to throw him down a cliff (Luke 4). He's no King! Actually,

C. He is not what we wanted. (53.3)

Who wants a King who is despised and rejected? If you associate with someone who is despised and rejected, what does that say about you? A man of sorrows? A man associated with pain? Who is attracted to that?

I remember a number of years ago; there were two couples that I knew. They did all sorts of things together, like going out to eat, on vacations, over to each other's homes for games, etc. The wife of one of the couples came down with a terminal condition that eventually took her life. The other couple stopped coming around and, in fact would not even visit her. They said, "She would not want us to see her that way." I think the truth was, they were repulsed by and fearful of sorrow and pain that had no earthly remedy. They did not know what to do, or what to say.

We typically do not look for friends who have serious life-dominating problems and we certainly are not attracted to a king that people hide from, and our repulsed from. It's not just the Islamic religion that is "offended" by a God who dies. It is not just our political world that mocks any sign of weakness. It is us. We despise someone who is weak and plain because that is what we really are, and we just do not want to admit it. If we align ourselves with a winner, if we dress like, walk like, hang out with those who are famous, then maybe, just maybe you think that I am famous and successful. If you think that about me, then maybe you won't notice the emptiness of my life. But, without Christ, we really are empty. Everything else is like a Hollywood set design. It's just a facade.

Jesus knows. He knows, in every fiber of his being he knows. He lived it. He tasted it. He was immersed in it, for you. That is why he says, if you want to follow me, if you want life, if you want forgiveness, want a home, forever, then give it up and admit the truth about yourself. Because I will only the broken will be made whole. Only the needy will be satisfied. Only sinners will be justified. Only the weak will be made strong. Only a King who suffers the most, will secure forever a salvation that cannot be broken and a kingdom that can never end. It is yours, not for purchase. Not to earn, and not through effort. It is yours by admitting the truth about yourself and believing the truth about him. You are a broken sinner, and Jesus, and only Jesus is your Savior. But know this. This King is not like any king that you know.

And his kingdom is not like any kingdom that you can imagine. Therefore, his rules for his followers are completely upside down.

Want to win? Lose.

Want to be strong? Admit your weakness.

Want to be whole? Admit your brokenness.

Want to hang on to your life? Let it go.

Want to lead? Follow.

Want to have influence? Serve.

Want to live - forever? Die.