Isaiah 52:13-15 *53: The King’s Coronation*

***Soaking Up Scripture***One of our goals as we planned tonight’s service was that you would be thoroughly soaked in Isaiah 53.

I’ve been telling people that I feel a little like Isaiah 53 is a lemon that I’ve been squeezing in order to get the juice out. I have not had to squeeze all that hard, it is a passage full of truth. But after 6 weeks, I was starting to wonder if there was any juice left. And I have every intention for us to go back to it on Easter Sunday. There’s a bit of good news there at the end that we are not going to want to miss.

So, as I was thinking about tonight’s service, I thought maybe we’d have to go to a different part of the Bible. How much more can I squeeze out of this chapter? Is there any juice left?

But then I went back and read through it again, and I found there is still a lot there. There is so much depth to God’s Word, and there’s still a lot left to say.

Instead of going in a different direction, then, we doubled down. We want you to marinate in Isaiah 53. We want you to be soaked in it.

The part of the chapter I want to bring you to, then, is the very beginning. It’s actually the last 3 verses of Isaiah 52. Remember what we said the first week: the Bible is inspired by God, the chapter and verse divisions are not. So, even though these verses are listed as Isaiah 52, they belong with chapter 53. They are the introduction to the suffering servant and, in their way, are a summary of what the whole chapter is about. **Isaiah 52:13-15**. Here’s what it says:

**13**See, my servant will act wisely;
    he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
**14**Just as there were many who were appalled at him—
    his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
    and his form marred beyond human likeness—
**15**so he will sprinkle 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.

Tonight’s service is the service at Hope Church where we focus most directly on the cross. It is Maundy Thursday, the day we remember Christ’s Last Supper. We’ll be partaking in communion in a bit. But I also consider this our Good Friday service. This is the worship service where we reflect on Christ’s death.

And that’s what these three verses are about. This is a passage that points to the exaltation of Jesus; but does so by talking about His humiliation. We are reminded in these verses that God’s ways are not our ways. The path to glory passes through Golgotha.

I’m calling this message “The King’s Coronation” because we are going to see that **Christ’s cross was also His throne.** What seemed like a terrible tragedy turns out to be a channel of blessing for the whole world. The cross is awful. It is terrible. But it is also where Jesus becomes our King.

***Lifted Up***There are three verses in our passage, so we are going to see three things about Jesus.

First, is what I will term **The Servant’s Unrivaled Success**. Verse 13:

**13**See, my servant will act wisely;
    he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

As I’ve mentioned earlier in this series, this chapter is one of at least 4 “Servant Songs” in the book of Isaiah. These are passages that talk about a coming Servant who seems to fit the Jewish hopes for a hero. That is, the Servant is often identified with the Jewish expectation of a Messiah: a warrior in the mold of David who will help Israel reclaim international prominence.

For Christians, this servant has been identified with Jesus. As we’ve seen in the last 6 weeks, this chapter fits the life and death of Jesus with an uncanny degree of accuracy.

But for those expecting an invincible warrior, this bulk of this prophecy contains more than a few challenges. The emphasis, for example, on suffering and death. Someone who is pierced and crushed doesn’t sound like much of a hero.

This verse at the beginning, though, is very Messianic indeed. Look at the three phrases used to describe the servant in the second line: “He will be raised” and “lifted up” and “highly exalted.” That’s what you want your national hero to be. This is someone who demands your attention. Someone with authority. When Isaiah describes his vision of God in chapter 6, He sees him seated on a throne, high and lifted up. Exalted.

Exalt is a good word. It means giving praise to someone who is praiseworthy. It means honoring those who deserve honor. God is exalted. Our praise and worship is His due.

The servant described here will be exalted. He will deserve our praise. He will enjoy unrivaled success.

There are, however, a couple of clues in this verse that the path to exaltation will not be as straightforward as might have been expected.

One is in the first line. It says: “See, my servant will act wisely.” For those who are familiar with the New Testament, the reference to wisdom might bring to mind **1 Corinthians 2:6-8:**

**6**We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. **7**No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

God’s wisdom is not like our wisdom. His plans do not follow our schedule. His path to glory does not follow our expected road to success. **Verse 8:**

**8**None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

What was the “wisdom” that led to the servant’s success? It is the wisdom of God that led Christ to the bloody cross where the world crucified the Lord of Glory.  That “wisdom” seemed like folly on Good Friday. Little did the world know, much less understand, what it was doing that day.

And the second clue that the path to success will involve suffering in **verse 13** is in the phrase “lifted up.” In context, those words mean great acclaim. We lift up our heroes. We put them on our shoulders and cheer for those who are successful.

But in the Bible, to “lift up” can have a more ominous meaning. In **John 3:14 Jesus says:**

**14**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

Here is an unmistakable pointer to the cross. Just as the bronze serpent was placed on a pole and lifted up over the camp of Israel so that all who looked upon it could be saved; so Jesus himself will be lifted up on a pole so that all who look to him can be saved.

***Disfigured and Marred***Which leads us to the second thing to see about Jesus in this passage: **the Servant’s Appalling Appearance.** The contrast between verse 13 and 14 is jarring enough to give you whiplash. After talking about the servant being raised and exalted, we are told:

 **14**Just as there were many who were appalled at him—
    his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
    and his form marred beyond human likeness—

I mentioned several weeks ago that Isaiah 53 is as close as we get to a physical description of Jesus in the Bible. At no point are we told how tall he was, or what color eyes he had, or what his smile looked like. This verse is about as close as we get; and some have speculated based on this verse that He may have had some sort of physical disfigurement.

But most scholars agree that this is not a description of Jesus’ physical appearance throughout his life; so much as a description of what He looked like in the hours before His death.

If you run the clock back from 3 o’clock in the afternoon on Friday—the moment of his death—to about 3 o’clock in the morning; and review what happened to Jesus as He moved through those hours, what you discover is that our Lord Jesus Christ endured 12 hours of unimaginable torture.

**Matthew 27:26-31** gives a brief synopsis of what He endured. We are told that:

he was flogged (that is, beaten by a bundle of leather straps studded with bits of bone, stone and glass);
he was stripped and dressed in robes of scarlet;
he was crowned with twisted strands of thorns pressed down onto his head:
he was handed a staff and mocked as soldiers knelt before him;
he was spit upon;
he was hit on the head again and again with that same staff;
he was forced to carry the heavy crossbeam through the streets of Jerusalem;
he had nails driven through his hands and feet:
he was left to suffer the slow suffocation that came from crucifixion.

If we had been there on that Friday in early spring we would have been appalled by what we saw, heard and smelled. Crucifixion was a ghastly way to die.

Jesus would not have even looked human. He would have been marred beyond all human likeness.

And yet, and yet… even at this moment of dreadful agony, there are hints that the exaltation of verse 13 was taking place. The soldiers thought they were being funny when they dressed Jesus like a king. They thought they were mocking him when they knelt before him. And yet, they had no idea how right they were. What they meant in jest was a foreshadowing of a coming day when every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phi. 2:10-11).

Or, again, **John 19:19-22** tells us:

**19**Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. **20**Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. **21**The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

You get a sense of just how frustrated Pilate was with this whole business. These petty Jewish Leaders wanted to be rid of Jesus, so they had him condemned on the trumped up charges of being a threat to Rome. Now Pilate has a little fun, and crucifies him under a sign calling him the king of the Jews.

But the leaders don’t like that. They don’t recognize Jesus as king. They reject the idea that He could be their king. He’s not the king of the Jews, they say, his crime is that he claimed to be the king of the Jews.

**Pilate’s response is the perfect example** of bureaucratic obstinance:

**22**Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

He’s more right than he knows. Even as Jesus hangs on the cross and dies, He is being crowned as the True King He is.

***Sprinkle Many Nations***
Which leads us to the final thing to see about Jesus in this passage, what I’ll call **The Servant’s Universal Victory.** Verse 15:

**15**so he will sprinkle 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.

Here is the result of Christ’s degradation and humiliation, here is the vindication of what Pilate meant as a joke: “kings will shut their mouths because of him.” In other words, Jesus is going to change the course of history. The princes and power brokers who plot and scheme will find no answer for the movement Jesus has now begun (cf. Psalm 2). The day is coming when He will be undisputedly recognized as the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16). He will be the hero the people expected, and so much more.

How does this happen? The key word is “sprinkle.” Christ will “sprinkle” many nations.

To get the sense of this word we need to go back to the instructions for the Day of Atonement. I talked about this a few weeks ago, when we were looking at patterns of substitution in the Bible. On that day, I focused primarily on the scapegoat, the goat that the High Priest placed his hands upon to transfer the sins of the people, before the goat was led outside of the camp and released into the wilderness. It is a picture of our sins being “taken away,” just as Isaiah 53:8 says that the servant was “taken away.”

But I mentioned at the time that the main sacrifice of the Day of Atonement actually involved two goats. The scapegoat, the second goat, carried the sins of the people away. But the first goat, the sacrificial goat, paid the price for those sins. And the word that is used to describe this was “sprinkle.” **Leviticus 16:15-16**:

**15**“He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull’s blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. **16**In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been.

The sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice represented the cleansing of sin. To sprinkle was to forgive. To sprinkle was to atone.

And so, make the connection to **Isaiah 52:14 and 15**: the appalling disfigurement of the servant is the sacrifice that brings cleansing to the nations. The one who appears unclean is actually the one who makes clean. This is why the cross can best be seen as Jesus’ throne. Because “with [His] blood [He has] purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Rev. 5:9)

**The universal nature** of Jesus’ triumph cannot be overstated. The effects of His sacrifice have no national limits. Though he was Jew dying on a Roman cross, because he was also the Son of God, his bloody sacrifice will provide cleansing and healing for many nations.

Not just for Israel.
Not just for the Jews.
Not just for the Romans.
Not just for the Greeks.

But for every nation on earth.

Pick up a globe and spin it in your hands. When it stops, let your finger fall at random anywhere on the globe. What nation did you land on?

Malaysia?
Bolivia?
Ukraine?
Mozambique?
Turkmenistan?
Belize?
Tunisia?
Latvia?

Every nation your finger lands on contains people for whom Jesus died. In each nation, Jesus is the true king. In each nation, the good news of Good Friday must be proclaimed.

***Communion***Which leads us now to the observation of communion.

On the night before Jesus went to the cross, He instituted this meal with His followers. He put a clear emphasis on the cup, which He equated with His blood.

Clearly this was in anticipation of the torture and execution He would experience the next day.

More than that, it was a reference to the Day of Atonement, to the sprinkling that brings our cleansing. We do not sprinkle the blood, but we do drink the cup. In this way we accept the sacrifice Christ made for us.

And so today, as you come forward to receive the elements, I want you to think about the way Christ substituted Himself for you. How he was bruised for your transgressions and crushed for your sins. How the punishment that brings us peace was upon Him. How by His wounds, we are healed.

But also, I want you to think about how this act of communion binds you to Christians across the ages and all around the globe. How what Jesus did on the cross was the beginning of a worldwide kingdom that continues to grow even 2000 years later.

I want you to think about how Jesus’ crucifixion was also His coronation. His cross is also His throne. I want you to remember that Jesus is our King.