THE SERVANT SONGS

The Servant Songs: Surely He Has Borne Our Griefs and Carried Our Sorrows

The man of sorrows, crushed for our iniquities and carrying our griefs

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, November 29, 2020
PASSAGES	Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 1 John 4:8; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; John 12:37-38; 1 Peter 2:23; Matthew 27:14; Luke 23:9; Philippians 2:8-9; Acts 8:30-35
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:58:34 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The last Servant Song turns the theology of its day upside down. Everyone assumed suffering meant God was punishing the sufferer. But the servant God exalts is marred, despised and crushed for *our* transgressions; by his wounds we are healed. Only Jesus fits that picture – and the same Jesus, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, suffers with us and carries us when loss comes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- When tragedy strikes, the Christian answer to "why" is honest but not fully satisfying: God is love, the world is broken, love requires real freedom, and God did not leave us alone in it.
- Christ not only suffered for us on the cross; he suffers with us, comforting us as one who knows sorrow from the inside.
- The song has five stanzas: the first and last speak of the servant's exaltation, the second and fourth of his suffering, and the center reveals that he suffered for us.

- Isaiah's contemporaries believed all suffering was God punishing the sufferer – the whole theme of Job. Isaiah saw the servant suffering for something we had done.
- The servant was unremarkable to the world's eye and despised, and that still describes how many treat Jesus.
- "High and lifted up" is language Isaiah uses only of God, yet this servant is also marred beyond human likeness – a conundrum only Jesus resolves.
- He still "makes intercession for the transgressors." We have no permission to give up on anyone.

▶ 0:58:34

It was the Sunday after Thanksgiving, and the church gathered with heavy hearts. That week two dear friends of the Hope community, Jose and Sarah, had been killed in a sudden, senseless tragedy, leaving two sons and grieving parents. Geno prayed for the boys, for the family caring for them, and for the Redeemer Lutheran community where Sarah had taught, and said he wanted to talk about the question in the background of every tragedy – why – before preaching his sermon.

Why?

▶ 1:01:03

He began with a simple statement: God is good all the time. John did not write that God loves, but that God *is* love (1 John 4:8). So why would he allow such people to be taken in the prime of life? "The Christian faith has an answer. It is not, however, particularly satisfying, and I want to make that clear... but I'm going to give it to you straight."

▶ 1:02:25

First, our world is broken. Our relationship with God is broken – we see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12) – and our relationships with one another are twisted, so man-made tragedies happen all too often. Second, God could have stopped it, but he has "purposefully and wisely limited his absolute sovereignty in this world" by honoring human beings with genuine freedom, including the freedom to choose poorly. "There's no such thing as love apart from freedom. No such thing as love apart from risk."

▶ 1:03:47

Third, God did not leave us alone with the consequences. He sent his Son to face them with us and, for our sins, to face them for us. Nothing can soften a blow like this, Geno said, "but our Christ not only suffers for us on the cross, he suffers with us in this life." He sends his Spirit to comfort us

(2 Corinthians 1:3–4), and he meets us in our pain "with the inside knowledge of one who has himself suffered immense pain and profound sorrow." "Dearly beloved, we must lean on that in this hour." The final answer to why must wait until we gather as one family at the end of time and can talk it over with God himself; until then, "we walk in the mystery of knowing that we live in a broken world where God loves us truly."

The text was already waiting

▶ 1:07:19

The text had been chosen two months earlier. Sitting with the news that week, Geno realized he had already titled the sermon: *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*. "I saw it and said, Lord, really?" In a world with too much tragedy and sin, "our Jesus, the suffering servant of Isaiah's text, is the One, capital O, who will carry us in time of need, and carries us now."

▶ 1:08:43

He recapped the first three songs: the servant brings God's *mishpat* to the earth without crushing a smoldering wick; he is a sharp instrument, discouraged, then told he will be a light to the nations; he is awakened morning by morning to give a sustaining word, and is humiliated and tortured but not rejected by God. The fourth song is longer: five stanzas of three verses each. The first and last speak of honor and exaltation; the second and fourth of suffering and humiliation; and the middle is the pinnacle.

1. The center: he suffered for us

▶ 1:12:17

> "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
>
> ISAIAH 53:4–6 ↗

▶ 1:12:59

"The first-person plurals are really important here." The theology of the day held that all suffering was punishment from God for the sufferer's sin – "it's obvious that he sinned against God, look how he is

suffering" – which is the whole theme of Job. Isaiah saw that the servant's affliction came from something *we* had done, and he put himself in the "we." Instead of punishment, the transgressor receives peace and healing. That revelation of a substitutionary sacrifice for all humanity was revolutionary and misunderstood for 750 years, until Jesus fulfilled it. The New Testament quotes this chapter at least seven times to explain the meaning of his death.

2. Despised and rejected

▶ 1:15:25

> "Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."
>
> ISAIAH 53:1–3 ↗

▶ 1:15:56

"Let me pause here. This is why I can say with great confidence that Jesus helps us in a time of sorrow. He comforts us as one who has experienced sorrow himself." By the world's measures nothing about the servant stood out – a struggling sucker-shoot of a plant, barely viable – and twice Isaiah says he was despised, not merely ignored. John used this very text to explain why people who saw Jesus' signs still did not believe (John 12:37–38). "We saw him one way. God saw him differently." Then and now, Jesus is often disbelieved, despised and ignored when he should be embraced.

3. Silent like a lamb

▶ 1:18:17

> "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth… And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."
>
> ISAIAH 53:7–9 ↗

▶ 1:19:26

"It wasn't enough to humiliate him in life; they had to humiliate him in death." The servant did not argue back. Peter saw it in Jesus: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return… but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Pilate and Herod were both dumbfounded by his silence (Matthew 27:14; Luke 23:9). His opponents took him for a curse – childless, buried among criminals in a borrowed tomb. Surely no great deliverer.

▶ 1:20:32

That is the upside-down nature of God's kingdom. We want a powerful, beautiful conquering king to rescue us from our enemies. God says, "Your most deadly and important enemy is actually within you – your sins, your iniquities. I will make a way for you to be delivered from that enemy with the death of my own Son on your behalf."

4. High and lifted up – and marred

▶ 1:21:12

> "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you – his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind – so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him."
>
> ISAIAH 52:13–15 ↗

▶ 1:21:56

"Behold my servant" – the exact words that opened the first song. "These servant songs are all talking about the same person, and there's only one person in history that fits all four." And "high and lifted up" is language Isaiah uses only of God Almighty. How can one be exalted like God and at the same time beaten beyond recognition? Torture and humiliation normally signaled a man cursed by God, yet God was exalting this one – and he cleanses the nations by his suffering. "Sprinkle" is a technical term from the sacrificial system, used for the blood, oil or water of ritual purification. New Testament scholars hear Paul's great hymn in this contrast: obedient to death, even death on a cross, then exalted and given the name above every name (Philippians 2:8–9).

5. Crushed, and satisfied

▶ 1:25:47

> "Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied... because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."
>
> ISAIAH 53:10–12 ↗

▶ 1:26:37

In "the will of the Lord to crush him," Geno heard immense pain for God. "It's an impossibility for me to think about crushing my own child." And the last line is a great comfort: he still "makes intercession for the transgressors" – not only those who have come to faith, but transgressors, period. "He hasn't tossed aside any marginalized by their sin and brokenness." Jesus is deeply concerned for those far from God and intercedes for them, and so should we. "We do not have permission from God to give up on people, to throw in the towel." Out of great humiliation – because of it – he receives great honor.

6. "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

▶ 1:28:16

No wonder the Ethiopian official, returning from worship in Jerusalem, needed help with this passage. Philip heard him reading it aloud and asked whether he understood. "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30–35). He was no ignorant man, Geno pointed out – learned, reading Hebrew, a long-time seeker sent on pilgrimage by his queen – and still he could not see how all this fit one person. "About whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Some still read it the first way, and Geno thinks they are wrong. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus."

▶ 1:30:34

The first disciples understood Isaiah to be describing Jesus, "and so should we." We should embrace the God-designed contrast in the servant's life, knowing "his humiliation had nothing to do with his own conduct and everything to do with ours." Geno quoted John MacArthur – "a pastor that I don't always agree with" – who said he would not understand the life of Jesus apart from this chapter of Isaiah. So exalt the name of Jesus above every name, and take every opportunity to tell others how he took the just penalty due us, so that we might be declared righteous. "What great salvation. What a great Savior."

▶ 1:31:59

He prayed for "a Spirit-filled intuition" of who Jesus is and what it cost him, that he did it willingly, because at the core of his being he is love – "loved us to the grave and beyond, to the resurrection and

the ascension." And he prayed for anyone wondering about their place with God, that they would say, "He did this for me. He was humiliated, disgraced, tortured for me. How can I deny my commitment to him?" "I know this has been a hard week," he said, inviting anyone who needed prayer to come forward.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 1 John 4:8
- 1 Corinthians 13:12
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–4
- Isaiah 53:4–6
- Isaiah 53:1–3
- John 12:37–38
- Isaiah 53:7–9
- 1 Peter 2:23
- Matthew 27:14
- Luke 23:9
- Isaiah 52:13–15
- Philippians 2:8–9
- Isaiah 53:10–12
- Acts 8:30–35

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Geno offered an honest but "not particularly satisfying" answer to why tragedy happens. Which part of it – a broken world, real freedom, God with us – helps you most, and what still troubles you?
2. How does knowing Jesus as "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" change the way you bring your own sorrow to him?
3. Isaiah's contemporaries assumed suffering meant God was punishing the sufferer. Where do you still catch yourself, or others, thinking that way?
4. What does it mean to you personally that "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all," with the prophet including himself in the "us"?
5. Jesus still makes intercession for transgressors. Who is someone you have been tempted to give up on, and how will you pray for them this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt closed his November 2020 series on Isaiah's Servant Songs with this message, preached the Sunday after Thanksgiving in a week when the Hope community was grieving the sudden loss of two friends. He had chosen the text and its title two months earlier, and he spoke to the congregation's grief before preaching it.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCNSf1vlkzg&t=3514s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.