
The Suffering Servant

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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Introduction Sign language speaks volumes. Hearing with our eyes powerfully communicates. And we all do it. We all sign. We all interpret. And much of these cymbals we use are universal.

Take for example the following signs.

Sign	Meaning
Hand waved in sweet gesture	greetings
Index finger extended and pointed upward	Jubilant victory
Outstretched hand to shake another's	Acceptance / reception
The index and middle finger extended and raised	Peace
Index finger extended outward AT someone	?

Lisa's shuffleboard

What does this sign mean? Theologically, what are we saying when (in an argument and sensing personal culpability) we extend the index finger outward at someone and spew words out to lighten our load? What's going on?

Yes, we may be scolding someone. But it's deeper than that, doesn't it? And no, we are not just "telling off someone". Nor are we simply "making a point". No, the index finger extended outward at someone reflects a profound need in every human being.

It expresses an aspect of being made in the image of God. It demonstrates an unexamined desire for something too profound to define simply. This signal with the hand is none other than Guilt Transference. **It is commonly known as blame shift.**

We simply cannot bear our own guilt. It crushes. It suffocates. Like fighting to the surface of water for oxygen, we must have our shame transferred from us to someone else lest we die an awful death.

This is why blame shifting is most popular. It is not merely popular with the young or the old or the rich or the poor. No. It is popular with human beings made in the image of God and corrupted by the fall of Adam. Every person recognizes that their shame is too much to bear. We point our fingers at everyone but self to lighten the unbearable load of guilt from the soul. But as you and I know from experience, it does not work.

So here's the question for this morning: **What makes our unbearable guilt go away?** The topic for this morning; *shifting blame off of self and onto someone else*, applies to each of us. The application of today's message is universal. We are about to witness the most staggering of all miracles in the Bible. And this miracle is like a GPS tracking device leading us to the only place at which we can experience an unburdening of guilt from our souls. Do you need rest for your soul? Are you this morning experiencing a troubled conscience? Do you want to find the peace and healing for your heavy heart?

Please open your Bibles to Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and get ready to watch the unveiling of the Suffering Servant whose only guilt is yours and whose only righteousness is his. Let us this morning look and live. Believe Jesus Christ is your only hope for your need of sin-removal / guilt-elimination. He is your only “scapegoat” who walks all your sins out into the wilderness so that they are forever gone. <pray>

Isaiah 52; starting in verse 13 unfolds the gospel for us.

This profound poem / prophecy written around 700 years before Jesus’ birth is beautifully organized in 5 sections; each of which having 3 verses. Notice that the first and last sections (52:13-15 & 53:10-12) reflect each other’s theme. And notice that the second and fourth sections (53:1-3 & 7-9) correspond to each other. And notice that the third section (v4-6) is in the center of the poem. It’s as though you can hear the “thump thump / thump thump” of the prophecy sending out its message of hope to a sin-infested / guilt-ridden world.

To behold the suffering servant and our only hope of salvation listen to the rhythm of the poem as I read it in its entirety.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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;
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand.

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;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

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.
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.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
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.
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;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
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.

Oh may God use His Word to reach our hearts.

Mystery

52:13-15

As we look at these verses related to Jesus, we begin with the first section (v13-15) and are confronted with mystery. We see the Servant high and lifted up and yet we see him repulsive and defeated and yet we see him accomplishing redemption. This high / low / success movement stands forth as the mystery.

glory

v13

First, found in v13 what we see of the prophecy of the Lord Jesus is his glory.

“high and lifted up” was used of Isaiah back in chapter six. Should you desire to feel the majesty of this description of Christ chapter six will assist you. He is the king. He is enthroned. He is holy, holy, holy.

Perhaps too, this verse hints at the mystery of his resurrection and ascension. Truly, we are on holy ground.

disgraced

v14

And yet, the tone shifts in the poem. V.14 is appalling. Read this verse well and you will feel it in your stomach. It describes when Jesus was on the cross. He was not merely beaten up. It was not as though people stared at him merely to say, “is this the Christ”? It was far worse than that. You could hear people in the first century outside Jerusalem on the hill called Golgotha say, “is that a human being”? Ripped, smeared, broken, battered, bleeding – disgraced. Hanging on the cross like a raw piece of meat infested with flies and maggots was the Christ on the cross.

graced

v15

And then the movement of the poem changes again – abruptly. V15 talks about Christ’s accomplishment on the cross. Due to v13 and his exaltation and due to v14 and his humiliation we find in v15 redemption. Sprinkling to cleanse the nations we see the Christ as a high priest. Washing his people of their polluted souls / shutting their mouths in sheer awe and reverence – and the effects of the cross came to the nations due to them seeing and understanding this mystery before our eyes this morning.

How about you? Do you see what is before your eyes? Do you understand how the guilty go free? Can you comprehend what makes your unbearable guilt go away?

You cannot see and you cannot hear by your unaided intellect. To get what you need you must have the revelation of 53:1-9 to which we now turn.

Revelation

53:1-9

When we look at Jesus we see utter suffering. Question: How does one explain this appearance of defeat and loss? How can a defeated, dejected, dehumanized king triumph over my sin and guilt?

These verses before us communicate that without revelation people simply have human opinion. They only have natural means to understand what they are seeing. They judge on appearance only. And their conclusions will be in error. And yet, those who have been given ability to see spiritual realities see this suffering of Jesus as both profoundly significant and successful. Notice this by first noticing v1-3.

Without it Jesus’ life as

v1-3

In v1 we are told that without revelation we view Jesus inaccurately.

not believable

v1

Without God revealing the identity and nature of Christ and his cross work to us Jesus is not believable. We look at Jesus and we do not believe. He will appear to the one who cannot see spiritually as not believable / as not credible / as not reliable.

not desirable

v2-3

Notice how this section develops. In v2-3, not only will Jesus look not credible but also he will seem not desirable. Without God-given sight we do not esteem him / we do not desire Jesus. We do not regard him as worthy of praise / as worthy of pursuit /

as worthy of worship. We just see a bloody mess of defeat. And that does not dazzle the heart with intrinsic value.

With it Jesus' dying as

v4-6

Ah but... in v4-9 with revelation we see the dying of Jesus as our only hope / we see the death of Jesus as the victory. The explanation of the great mystery of 52:13-15 is given. In these verses, we come across God revealing the true identity and activity of His son Jesus. In these verses we see **how our unbearable guilt goes away**. And what that produces in the believer's life is life-changing.

our relief

v4-5

According to v4-5, with revelation we see the dying of Jesus as the only source of relief. All the grief, all the sorrow, all the gaping wounds in his body flowing blood upon the thirsty land is due not to his sin but ours. When God opens our eyes to understand why Jesus came to die we see the transfer of our guilt onto him. All our griefs, sorrows, transgressions, iniquities were placed on him. He was the fall guy. He was the scapegoat. He took our place and was pierced by God's just wrath. And this brought us peace with God and healing for the soul.

our substitute

v6

If v4-5 were not enough, God through Isaiah in v6 makes plain why Jesus suffered and died. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor.5:21). Salvation comes to enemies of God because Christ himself became the perfect and final substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of those who have saving faith in Jesus. To be reconciled to God through the suffering of Christ is to be at peace with God. The war against your treason is over. The penalty for your rebellion has been paid in full. Consequently, an inner healing of the conscience occurs. Shame removed. Unbearable guilt taken off the troubled soul. Do you see the Christ this way?

With it we see Jesus' death as

v7-9

As we continue the theme of noticing Jesus accurately thanks to God-given revelation, we come to v7-9 and look at Jesus' death accurately. How do you explain the death of Christ? Was he weak and could not stop the injustice against him (that's what v7 combats). Was he simply at the wrong place and the wrong time?

Intentional

v7

V.7 clears up any guess work. His death was voluntary. He intentionally laid down his life for his people. Nobody took it from him. Nobody overpower him. He simply gave it up.

Undeserved

v8-9

And in verses 8,9 we notice how undeserved his death truly was. He did not earn this punishment because of something he had done. It was all due our sin.

Victory

v10-12

Are you beginning to see what is truly in front of us this morning? Do you understand the mystery of 52:13-15 now? Are you becoming convinced of the only way unbearable guilt is taken away?

There is one last section in the poem that without it all we've hoped for and joyed over would be for not. Without the resurrection we of all people are to be most pitied (cf. 1Cor.15). Follow me out to the scenic point of v10-12 and ready yourself for the breathtaking vista of Christ's victory. He was crushed as the innocent substitute for our sins but was raised in triumphant victory for our justification.

Through strategic death

v10a

In v10 we reverently walk onto divine strategy in the killing of Jesus. Who killed the Christ according to v10a? Was it The Jews? Was it the Roman soldiers? Can you ultimately credit Pontius Pilate or Herod? You tell me. Reread the first part of v10. Jesus was carrying out the will / pleasure of his Father as he hung on that instrument of human torture known as the cross. Jesus though tormented in unimaginable pain was not angry at his accusers. He did not spit out curses on his enemies. Rather, v10 tells us Jesus willingly submitted to God's plan to execute His Son (cf. Acts 4:28). God almighty laid down His servant as a guilt offering. And He killed the offering to provide the only means by which guilty sinners can be reconciled to a holy God. Yet, amazingly that is not the end of the story.

Through stunning resurrection

v10b-12

Left there, we would have a martyr as a model at best in Jesus. But no life! We would have a strange explanation for Christ's crucifixion but with no happy Conquer over death and no hope after death. But notice in the middle of v10-12 how the poem turns the volume up as it portrays Christ's resurrection from the dead.

It was equally the LORD's pleasure to raise his servant up from the grave to life. And this crescendo accomplished all his purposes in the salvation of sinners – the servant's death, resurrection and glorious triumph. The one who descended to unimaginable depths of death on a cross has ascended to unimaginable heights of glory.

And now, with God fully satisfied with Christ's accomplishment on the cross, v11 says that now Jesus exults over his work. He looks upon his accomplishment; justifying sinners and feels satisfied. He who enjoys clearing the guilty by his death now stands over the universe; over his people with victorious joy. Making former enemies into forever friends is his delight. He gladly shares all His life and belongings with His people. And he lives forever (according to the last line of the poem) to make intercession for his people. Jesus; both the sacrifice and the priest, cares for and keeps his people for all eternity.

This is what the poem is about. This is gospel's answer to human guilt and hopelessness. The perfect lamb sacrificed for human guilt before the holy God. The holy God now fully satisfied with Christ's work. And Christ is fully satisfied with his own work; his people justified forevermore.

Now can you answer the question **“What makes our unbearable guilt go away”?**

Conclusion

If you are an unbeliever...

- Admit your ways of blame shifting are wholly inadequate.
- Look away at your strategies for peace and healing.
- Look to Christ who bore the guilt of his people and carried it completely away.
- Turn from sin and trust in Christ. Rejoice in the sin-atonement death and the victorious resurrection. Come to Christ. Come to Christ.

If you are a believer...

- Locate how you try to shift your blame to others. Remember, there is no need to
- Rehearse this poem much to your heart til your heart rejoices in Christ.
- Daily take your sins to Christ and find your refreshment in his offering and resurrection.

How does unbearable guilt go away? Let none of us any longer point outward to shift the weight of shame off of the burdened soul. Rather, let us all by faith point upward to the once dead and now living forever sacrifice for sin; point to Jesus and enjoy peace and healing.