

# Easter (1988) - the Sufferings of Christ

by Mariano Di Gangi

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*The sermon highlights the significance of the servant in Isaiah 52, who represents Jesus Christ, and emphasizes the importance of remembering the sufferings of Christ in our redemption.*

**Duration:** 33:54

**Scripture:** Isaiah 52:13

**Topics:** "Suffering"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the need to turn our eyes upon Jesus in these challenging times when ecclesiastical institutions and church bodies are failing us. He highlights the wisdom and prudence of God's servant, who strengthens the bruised and rekindles what would otherwise be snuffed out. The preacher refers to Isaiah 49 to illustrate how God's servant deals wisely and prudently. The sermon also mentions Isaiah 52:13-15, which serves as a magnifying glass, focusing on the ideal servant described in previous chapters. The preacher emphasizes that this servant not only acts wisely but also endures suffering, as seen in the disfigurement and rejection he faces.

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## Transcript

We begin this evening a series that leads toward Good Friday and Easter. And the passage of scripture that I have chosen for these several Sunday evenings is one of the most familiar in the entire Bible. It begins with Isaiah 52, verse 13, and goes through to the end of that magnificent 53rd chapter.

An Orthodox Jew who went on a journey to the Netherlands and happened to have contact with the Christian retreat center there began to read this portion of scripture. And his heart was so moved and his soul was so stirred as he contemplated the picture of Christ in his suffering, in his sorrow, in his silence, in his sacrifice, in his sovereignty. But he received Jesus as his Messiah, as his Savior, as his Lord.

And he is now teaching the doctrines of the Reformed faith in the city of Ottawa. Let's turn to the first of the texts in this series. Isaiah chapter 52, beginning to read at verse 13.

Many times people begin with the 53rd chapter. But the way to understand the 53rd is to consider the conclusion of the 52nd chapter which leads into it. The 52nd chapter of Isaiah, beginning to read at verse 13.

See, my servant will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him, his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man, and his form marred beyond human likeness.

So will he 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.

God says, Behold my servant. According to what is written in the scriptures of the Old Testament, God called the people of Israel to be his servant. He made it known through special revelation that the people of Israel was to be his servant.

Totally committed to him. Fully consecrated to him. Willing and loyal, giving him its allegiance and rendering to him its loving obedience.

That is what God had in mind for the people of Israel. To be his servant and through Israel to bring blessing to all the nations of the earth. That was God's intention right from the beginning.

For when God singled out Abraham and took him out of a pagan background and said, Abraham, I want you. God promised to give Abraham many descendants. God promised to give Abraham a land in which to dwell.

And God also promised that through Abraham and his descendants, blessing was to come to all the nations of the earth. Theologians would say that God's particularism is unto universalism. Namely, that God chooses an individual and through that individual, wills to bring blessing to all the families of the earth.

But what did the people of Israel do? It might be simpler to ask, what didn't they do? They made for themselves graven images and worshipped them in place of God. They didn't show gratitude for the great deliverance from bondage in the days of the Exodus, but felt that they were the masters of their own destiny and the captains of their own fate. He sent them his spokesmen, the prophets, and to these prophets they not only turned a deaf ear, but they pelted them with stones, they clapped them in chains, and they sawed some of them asunder.

He reached out to them in love and they wounded the hand that was extended to them in grace. Instead of allegiance, there was disloyalty of the worst sort. Instead of obedience, there was an obstinate and rebellious streak against Almighty God.

Instead of being the Lord's servant, the people of Israel became a scandal and fell captive to the heathen under the discipline of God. What Israel failed to be, God would demonstrate and incarnate in the person of his Son, the Messiah. He is the servant of the Lord.

Accomplishing by his words and by his works what Israel should have done but failed to do, namely, to serve the Lord with faithfulness and to be the means of blessing to the ends of the earth. Now the text that I have chosen for this evening, Isaiah 52, verses 13, 14, and 15, can be compared to a spot of light filtered through a magnifying glass. You see, before this text was given, God had made known what his ideal servant would be like.

In chapter 42 of Isaiah's prophecy, and again in chapter 49, and still further in the 50th chapter, God had revealed what the ideal servant was to be like. And now, all that is revealed in chapters 42, 49, and 50 is filtered through the magnifying glass and comes with burning intensity to focus here in the words of our

text. And so, in order to understand Isaiah 53, which we will be doing on successive Sunday evenings, and in order to gather up the teaching of the preceding chapters, we have to take a very close look at our text.

Behold, says God, see my servant. Turn your eyes upon him. And these are days when we need to do that.

These are days when ecclesiastical institutions fail us. These are days when church bodies show their moral, spiritual, and doctrinal bankruptcy. These are days in which people barter away the solid doctrinal and evangelical heritage of the past for a mess of secular humanistic pottage.

These are days when big-name leaders show that they have feet of iron mingled with clay and fall more often into the very immorality they denounce in others than those who are at the receiving end of their messages. And how we need to turn from faltering, fallible, falling institutions and from men who preach with conviction but have lost credibility to turn our eyes upon Jesus and behold God's servant. And we learn about this servant several tremendous truths in the words of this text.

And the first is this. He will act wisely, prudently. How will he do this? We are told in the preceding chapters how he will act wisely and deal prudently.

Consider, for example, what we find in the opening words of Isaiah, chapter 42. Here we are given a picture of the wisdom with which this servant acts toward men and women in desperate need. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out. He will not raise his voice in the streets.

A bruised reed he will not break. A smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.

He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope. God's servant is one who will act wisely.

Beloved of God, endowed with the Holy Spirit, committed to bringing justice and fairness among the nations, he is not a street brawler who shouts and cries out. He deals wisely, prudently, gently. A bruised reed he will not break.

A smoldering wick he will not snuff out. What does that expression mean? What would you do with a bruised reed? What would you do with a smoldering wick? A bruised reed is absolutely good for nothing. You take it and bend it over your knee and break it and discard it upon the rubbish heap.

What would you do with a smoldering wick? It doesn't give any light. It's just polluting the air so you snuff it out completely. That is not the way God's servant deals with men and women.

He deals with them wisely, prudently, gently for their highest good. He takes that which was bruised and instead of breaking it completely and destroying it, he mends it again so that it can be of use to others. He takes those whose earlier devotion to God is now not something that is bright and burning but something that is ready to die and he breathes upon it with the power of his Holy Spirit and it begins to burn and to glow afresh.

He is in the business of restoring that which is bruised and of rekindling that which is smoldering. And that is the kind of servant whom God was pleased to send into the world for you and for me. And if our lives are bruised, God forbid that we should ever feel that they are worthless.

And if we are like a smoldering wick that gives no light, God forbid that we should ever give up on ourselves. He is the one who deals wisely, prudently, gently. He strengthens what is bruised.

He rekindles what would otherwise be snuffed out. Ask Doubting Thomas. Ask Peter who denied his Lord.

And you will see how God's servant deals wisely, prudently, gently, tenderly toward men and women in their desperate need. Something similar is said at the beginning of the 49th chapter of the book of Isaiah. Here we have another picture of God's servant dealing wisely and prudently.

Isaiah 49, beginning at verse 1. Listen to me, you islands, and hear this, you distant nations. Before I was born, the Lord called me. From my birth, he has made mention of my name.

He made my mouth like a sharpened sword. In the shadow of his hand, he hid me. He made me into a polished arrow, concealed me in his quiver.

He said to me, you are my servant. In you, I will display my splendor. But I said, I have labored to no purpose.

I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God. And now the Lord says, he who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself.

This is the servant of the Lord, dealing wisely, dealing prudently, repairing what is ruined, rekindling what is snuffed out, and bringing Jacob and restoring Israel back to God. Behold, my servant, he will act wisely. But the next thing that we notice in our text, in Isaiah 52, verse 14, is that he will not only act wisely, but he will endure suffering.

As it is written, there were many who were appalled at him. His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man. His form marred beyond human likeness.

He will not only act wisely, he will endure suffering. There has been a tendency in Protestantism, in reaction against a particularly Latin type of Roman Catholicism, to do away with anything that reminds us vividly, graphically, physically, of the sufferings of Jesus. We concentrate on the risen Lord, on the joy and the peace that he gives, and this is right, because we do live on this side of Good Friday, in the light and the glory of the resurrection.

But God forbid that in recoiling against the excesses of a Roman Catholicism that didn't get beyond Good Friday, we should forget what it cost the servant of God to redeem us from our sins. We need to think upon Christ in his suffering. It's not upbeat, it's not pleasant, but it's certainly scriptural.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, even the unpleasant passages which speak of flesh that is torn, which speak of blood that is shed, which speak of agony of body, soul, and spirit that afflicted and affected our Savior in Gethsemane at Golgotha on Calvary. We need to think of the sufferings of Christ. He will not only deal wisely, he will endure suffering.

Many will be appalled at the sight of him. His appearance is the appearance of one who is disfigured, of one who is marred. And here too, in the preceding chapters of Isaiah, we have references to the suffering of the servant of the Lord.

Think, for example, about what is found in Isaiah chapter 50, verses 6 and 7. Words that have been set to music by George Frederick Handel and heard by many around the world, but in too many cases as mere entertainment rather than as a description of the suffering of Jesus. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked out my beard. I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.

Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. Here is one who offers his back to those who beat him.

How did they beat him? They beat him with the kind of whip that was made of leather and filled with bits of bone and metal. So that it was not merely the terrible pain of a leather whip that left welts upon one's back, but when the whip was withdrawn, the bits of metal and of bone would rip away the flesh and leave it a bleeding wound. That is what happened to Jesus.

The servant of the Lord will not only act wisely, he will endure suffering. His cheeks were made to bleed by those who plucked at his beard. He hid not his face from shame and spitting.

He used his saliva to mingle it with the earth, to reach out and touch a blind man and give him sight. They used their saliva to spit in the face of him who is the revelation of the unseen God. That is what humanity is really like in its rebellion against the Lord.

And what we find in Isaiah 50, we find repeated in the words of our text. Many were appalled at him. His appearance was disfigured.

Beyond that of any man, his form marred beyond human likeness. God forbid that we should ever forget what it cost the servant of the Lord to save us from our sins. He will act wisely, he will endure suffering, and he will restore purity.

We need to take sin seriously or else grace is going to be cheapened beyond all recognition. Sin is not merely flouting social conventions. Sin is not merely outraging contemporary moral standards.

Sin is an assault against the majesty of a holy God. Sin, says the Apostle John, is a transgression of the law. Not the laws passed by Congresses and Parliaments, not the edicts enacted by dictators, but the law of him who is maker of heaven and earth and has every right to issue commands.

And when we sin, we not only incur the displeasure of a holy God, we not only break the just laws of this sovereign, we not only incur his penalty, but we pollute ourselves and those whom our sinfulness affects and infects. Sin involves not only a penalty from the hands of a righteous and a holy God, sin involves the pollution of personality. We are contaminated.

Shakespeare, in one memorable scene of Macbeth, shows Lady Macbeth wringing her hands in utter desperation, trying to make them clean of the blood that has been shed because of her malice and her conspiracy in murder. Guilt. Pollution of personality, as well as a penalty from the God whose law that we have broken.

And the servant of the Lord comes into the world not only to absorb the penalty of our sin, but to purify us from the pollution that attaches to personality when we are defiled by our own disobedience. And in the words of our text we read, so will he sprinkle many nations. It was the custom in ancient Israel to give the people an object lesson, to show them that sin deserved punishment, but that if that punishment was visited on a sacrificial victim that was substituted for the sinner, God's justice would be demonstrated, the penalty would be vicariously paid, and the sinner would be released from wrath.

Then the blood of the sacrificial victim was taken and sprinkled upon the masses of the people to signify that atonement had been made and purification was now offered, and those sprinkled with the blood of sacrifice were purified of their pollution. Their conscience was clean. Their guilt was gone.

And now purified and pardoned, they could experience peace with God. And that is what the Apostle John means when in his first letter he says, The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. And he assures us that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So shall he sprinkle many nations. You see, the prophet sees the scope of the work of the Messiah. He comes not merely for a group of people who inhabit the land of Palestine.

He comes to bring blessing to all the families of the earth. So shall he sprinkle. So shall he purify.

So shall he restore cleansing to all nations. And the hymn writer has put it beautifully, powerfully in these words. Savior, sprinkle many nations.

Fruitful let thy sorrows be. By thy pains and consolations, draw the Gentiles unto thee. Of thy cross, the wondrous story, be it to the nations told.

Let them see thee in thy glory and thy mercy manifold. He will act wisely. He will endure suffering.

He will restore purity. And one thing more, he will receive honor. Notice what is said in verse 15 of our text.

Kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see. What they have not heard, they will understand.

The gospel will be revealed to them. And the suffering servant of the Lord will, according to verse 13, be raised up, lifted up, highly exalted. What did Peter preach on the day of Pentecost? In the power of the Holy Ghost.

He preached that Jesus had been humiliated by men and now was highly exalted by God. How did the author of the letter to the Hebrews begin his magnificent epistle? God, who at different times and different ways spoke to our forefathers by means of the prophets, has in these last days wrapped it all up and spoken to us in the person of his Son, who is the express image of God, who is the very outshining of God's nature and character. And after he had purged our sins on the cross, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

What does Paul say writing to the Philippians? We all know the passage, we simply have to paraphrase it. Equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, became a man, became a servant, was obedient, even if it meant dying, even if it meant dying on a cross, and wherefore God now has highly exalted him. Men condemned him and killed him as a common criminal, but God vindicated him.

God raised him from the dead. God lifted him from earth to heaven. God exalted him highly and crowned him with glory and with honor.

And that is the climactic point of the libretto of Handel's Messiah, and that is the great theme that is resounding through the corridors of the book of the Apocalypse. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise forever and ever. The servant acts wisely.

He endures suffering. He restores purity. And he receives honor at the hands of the Father who rewards his work of redemption and makes him King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is the Christ we worship. This is the Christ who is our Savior and our Lord. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the servant of the Lord. You are the Savior of all who put their trust in you. Help us to rely upon your grace and to be remolded into the likeness of the servant that we may serve you with a willing heart and wash one another's feet, serving one another in love, in the fellowship of the church, in our families, and in the midst of a world that still crucifies you afresh.

Lord Jesus, help us to take our place beneath your cross to worship you, to love you, and to serve you. Amen.

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