

Jesus willingly suffers for us so that we don't have to suffer. And last week, we looked at some of the prophecies and we were amazed at how that these prophecies came to fruition 700 years after the prophet Isaiah, prophesied about the suffering servant.

In Isaiah 53, we have seen that the Prophecies from Isaiah 53 have come to fruition in Jesus:

Isaiah 53:1

The Messiah's own people would not believe he was the Christ.

Isaiah 53:3

God's Servant, the Messiah, would be rejected by people.

Isaiah 53:4

God's Servant, the Messiah, would suffer for the sins of others.

Isaiah 53:5

God's Servant, the Messiah, would be beaten and wounded.

Isaiah 53:7

God's Servant, the Messiah, remained silent and did not argue with those who were accusing him.

Isaiah 53:9a

God's Servant, the Messiah, would be buried in a rich man's cave.

Isaiah 53:9

God's Servant, the Messiah, would be innocent.

Isaiah 53:10

God's Servant, the Messiah, would be resurrected and live forever.

With all these prophecies fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, you would think that the Jews today would come to saving faith in Jesus Christ as their Messiah, but they don't.

As I said in a previous sermon,

many Jews refuse to see Jesus in Scripture –

*You cannot see what you refuse to look at.*

We see a good example of this adage in their modern Haftarah reading schedule.

What do they do?

The rabbis leave out Isaiah 53 – They don't read passages that talk about the Messiah.

They read **Isaiah 49**, 50, 51, 52 (up to 52:12), 54, 55, and 56, but it's interesting the rabbis subtly leave out the exact passages that speaks of the Messiah: Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12.

Another reason they cannot see that Isaiah 53 points to Jesus as Messiah is that many Jews don't read their Bible –

Approximately 80% of Jews are actually secular Jews, so most of them have little or no interest in their own Bible, let alone Isaiah 53.

Now there are a small group of Jewish rabbis who are aware of Isaiah 53, but they still reject Jesus as the Messiah.

Some of these rabbis are called counter missionaries.

These counter missionaries say that Isaiah 53 is not talking about Jesus, but Israel.

They say Israel is the true suffering servant.

For these Jewish rabbis,

Israel, not Jesus, was despised and rejected by mankind.

Israel, not Jesus, suffered, and was familiar with pain.

Israel, not Jesus, was despised, and held in low esteem.

Israel, not Jesus, took up our pain

and bore our suffering,

Israel, not Jesus, was pierced for our transgressions,

and crushed for our iniquities;

and by Israel's wounds we Gentiles are healed.

The Lord laid on Israel

the iniquity of all the Gentiles.

Now is this true?

Could it be Israel, not Jesus who is the suffering servant?

Could these rabbis be right?

Just a sidebar, I remember last week after church during the Bible study, our brother Derrick admitted that he didn't know any Jewish rabbis. He felt bad about it. But no need to feel bad – most non-Jews cannot name one either.

Let me prove my point here.

Can anyone name me a famous rabbi?

Who hears knows the name of at least one famous rabbi?

No one? I hear crickets.

I'm going to introduce you two famous rabbis:

#### 1) Rabbi Shlomo Itzchaki, 1040-1105

Today generally known by the acronym Rashi.

He is a 11 century Medieval rabbi.

In Rashi's commentary on the book of Isaiah,

he says that the suffering servant is Israel

(that is, the Jewish people).

#### 2) Rabbi Kimchi קמחי דוד 1160–1235 AD the RaDaK

These 2 rabbis believed that Israel is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

They, along with a few later rabbis, wanted to prevent the Jewish people from accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

Knowing that many Jews were coming to faith in Jesus Christ through Isaiah 53, they began to teach that the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 was not the Messiah, but Israel.

Now their view became controversial, even among the Jews at that time.

Many Jews rejected their view for several reasons:

First, if you look at ancient Jewish writings before these 2 rabbis, you will see that the rabbis before them referred to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, not to Israel but to the Messiah.

For example, in the Targum, the Aramaic translation of the Jewish Bible, Rabbi Jonathan ben Uzziel (one of the most respected, authoritative rabbis in history amongst Jews), considered the greatest disciple of Hillel (also a very highly esteemed, famous rabbi), writes in the early second century:

Behold my servant Messiah shall prosper; he shall be high, and increase, and be strong ... (Targum Jonathan on Isaiah 53)

Notice the word Messiah in the Targum.

This proves, a thousand years before Rashi and Kimchee were even born, the Jews believed that the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 was the Messiah, not Israel.

Interestingly, the Talmud never attributes Isaiah 53 to the people of Israel as a nation.

Instead it refers to the suffering servant as the Messiah.

In Tractate Sanhedrin 98

The Messiah—what is his name?...The Rabbis say, the leprous one; those of the house of Rabbi say, the sick one, as it is said, "Surely he hath borne our sicknesses." (Sanhedrin 98b)

Let me give you list of more Talmudic passages and others from Jewish literature that attribute Isaiah 53 to the Messiah:

- Sotah 14
- Midrash Rabbah
- Midrash Tanhuma
- Midrash Kohen
- Yalkut Shimoni 4
- The Jewish Prayer Book for the Day of Atonement
- The Zohar

A second reason the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is not Israel is the suffering servant is referred to in the singular. If it were referring to Israel, it would be in the plural.

A third reason the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 cannot be Israel is that verse 8 talks about the suffering servant being cut off from the land of the living. He was stricken for the transgressions of his people.

But has the Jewish people been cut off out of the land of the living? No, they still exist!

The Jews have amazingly continued to exist and they are going strong.

To this day, they are in Israel as a nation – still here even though they have been exiled from their land for almost 2 millennia.

Yet another reason the suffering servant cannot be Israel is that Isaiah 53 says the suffering servant is righteous.

If we look at Israel's and Judah's track record, they have never been righteous.

God throughout the Old Testament sends His prophets but Israel always rebels.

The few that were called righteous in the Old Testament -- like David -- were imputed with the righteousness of God because of their faith, not because they were intrinsically righteous.

Abraham, for example, was imputed righteousness – justified because he believed in the Promise of the Gospel.

**Genesis 15:6**

**Abraham believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**

But Israel is under a covenant of works -- rewards for obedience; curses for disobedience.

It is impossible for Isaiah 53 to apply to Israel because it would go against Scripture.

How can Israel suffer for righteousness?

If they were righteous, God promised they would be blessed and would stay in their land.

If they were disobedient, God would curse them, they would suffer – they would be kicked out of their land by their enemies.

So if they suffer and are kicked out of their land, then that is a sign, evidence that they are not righteous.

And we see this repeatedly in Israel's history, whenever they lacked faith in God's promise and they did not obey God, they were exiled from the land. We see this works principle in effect in the Old Testament when God uses 2 empires to punish His people for disobedience: the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom, Israel; and the Babylonians devastated the Southern Kingdom Judah, where we see the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC.

And again we see the same **Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.**

Under Titus – the prince of the Roman Empire – many Jews were killed, many were even crucified by the Romans.

It was so terrible that the Jews to this day still mourn on Tisha B'Av, which takes place on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Av.

What could the Jews have done 2000 years ago so that God's anger was so provoked that He would permit the temple to be destroyed and no longer used for worship and sacrifices – even to this day.

Could it be -- as it was prophesied in Isaiah 53, Psalm 118, Zechariah 12 -- that the Jews actually rejected their very own Messiah?

Something thought-provoking:

40 years after Jesus's earthly ministry – In 70 AD, the various political-religious groups of Jews were all punished so severely that many died horrendous, unspeakable deaths.

They had lost their land, their holy city -- attesting to the principle of curses for disobedience to the hands of the enemy.

The temple was burned and razed to the ground.

The destruction was so horrible that the historian Josephus says:

"The number of those that perished during the whole siege [was] one million, one hundred thousand, ... [They came] up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread and were of a sudden shut up by an army ... came a pestilential destruction upon them and soon afterward such a famine as destroyed them more suddenly... The multitude of them who therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God brought on the world." Josephus; Book VI, IX: 3, 4.

It's fascinating that Jesus had prophesied about this destruction 40 years earlier.

He prophesied that the temple would be completely obliterated:

"Do you see all these things [buildings on the temple mount]?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." Matt 24:2

And in 70 AD, Jesus's prophecy came true.

All the buildings on the temple mound were completely demolished.

We even have archaeological remains of the stones that Jesus was talking about.

We also have this event recorded by Josephus. The Roman armies, after they captured the temple, systematically destroyed it one stone at a time.

The Romans destroyed the temple by fire and the gold, which adorned the temple, had melted between the joints of the stones.

The Roman soldiers then dismantled the temple stone by stone to retrieve the gold.

In this event, all the Jews:

Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, etc. all suffered and many died. Some were even crucified outside the city.

And some of the Jews like the Zealots were completely wiped out.

There was, however, one group of Jews I haven't mentioned that escaped unscathed, unharmed, unpunished.

Do you know who they are?

Do you know how they escaped all the danger?

I will give you a clue through Luke 21.

The clue is found in Jesus's warning to his followers 40 years before the destruction of Jerusalem of 70 AD:

"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out ... For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. Here will be great distress ... and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles ...." Luke 21:22-24

Jesus' followers -- Jewish-Christians – Heeded the Warning of Jesus, and Escaped to Pella. They remembered what Jesus had said 40 years earlier; they left Jerusalem and escaped unscathed to Pella, a city in present-day Jordan.

What's interesting is the account of the escape is recorded in Eusebius's Church History (3.5.3).

But the ... [followers of Christ] in Jerusalem had been commanded ... to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. [Jerusalem] and Judea were entirely destitute ..., the God's judgment overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and His Apostles, and totally destroyed those impious men. Eusebius's Church History (3.5.3).

You see the destruction of Jerusalem is a type and shadow of the judgment to come.

Because Jesus had suffered and died 40 years before the great destruction of Jerusalem. His followers would not have to die – like the unbelieving Jews – all because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' words had saved his followers.

Isaiah 53:11 says,

After he has suffered,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.

Jesus suffered and he rose again – he saw the light of life – and was satisfied. He resurrected first so that he can justify us by bearing our iniquities.

What does justify mean?

It means to declare righteous.  
Just as Abraham was declared righteous, we will be declared righteous if we like Abraham believe in God's promise – His Gospel.

So like Abraham, **How are we justified?**

**We are justified by grace alone through faith alone on account of Christ alone.**

You see, if we place our faith in the Gospel alone – in Jesus's Life, Death and Resurrection – for our justification, we will be declared righteous in front of a holy, righteous God.

In Isaiah 53:12, it states,

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Wow, Jesus poured out his life unto death – for us.  
And he was numbered with us – the transgressor – the sinner.  
He was unjustly punished like a sinner when he was innocent.  
He bore the sin of the many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Praise God for the suffering servant!

Let us pray,