

Introduction

- Ever noticed the distinction there is in many spheres of life between those **who really know why they are doing the job** they are doing, and **those who are just doing it to keep a roof over their heads?**
 - **politicians** who have a burning passion to make a difference, and those whose concern is merely to please people and stay/get into power?
 - the **health professional** who wants to make sure you are properly cared for, and the one to whom you are merely another patient?
 - the **teacher** who inspires you to learn, and the one who just repeats back the text book?
- **The ones that stand out have at the heart of what they do a clear sense of who they are and why they are there.**
 - **who are we as Christians?** What lies at the heart of what we believe? What shapes and informs everything that we seek to do?
 - **the Cross of Jesus**, and what **he** achieved there - which is exactly what this passage explores!
- Let's explore!

Exposition

- Our culture **values the underdog**, the one who comes from behind to win through, who makes good despite a poor start in life:
 - **Ross Robison**, exam results, Braidhurst... made the papers!!
 - Andy Murray!
- Culturally, that would have been **unthinkable in Isaiah's day**, and yet that is the context entering this passage:
- Incredible reversals of fortunes in Isaiah 52:13:
 - from **servant** to **raised up**
 - from **appalled** to **kings shutting mouths**
 - from **no understanding** to **understanding**

(53:1) Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

- How did this reversal come about?
 - *this is the big question, that has been hanging over our studies up to this point...*
- We have...
 - seen something of the **character of the servant**, his gentleness, his justice, his faithfulness;
 - seen something of **his purpose**, to reach out to the outsider, the Gentile
 - seen something of **his desire to transform** situations, to bring light into darkness, freedom to the captives - into God's presence from outside!
- But how that is accomplished is yet hidden from Isaiah!
 - we've had hints of suffering to come, but no explanation...
- Now we meet the **"arm of the Lord"**; that which has been hidden is now **"revealed"**!
 - that which could not be believed is now made plain.....

(53:2) He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

- Without **revelation**, **who could believe that Jesus**, with his peasant birth, his anonymous early life, his unimpressive appearance (not everyone who met him in his lifetime was convinced!!) **was the arm of the Lord?!**
 - (**Mat 13:55**) **"is this not the carpenters son?"**; imagery of growth from the soil points to a wholly natural origin, a human family tree
 - genuinely wasn't easy to believe Jesus was the Lord come to save; **we shouldn't forget how hard it is for people to make that leap today! Only by grace, by God's touch...**

(53:3) He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar

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with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

- So, rather than following him, people shunned him:
 - ever seen something similar happen, when someone takes up a cause... (veggie, animal rights ...?)
 - at first folk tolerate their enthusiasm
 - but after a while, patience begins to wear thin;
 - people become uncomfortable with the cause, especially when there is a contrast between their values and those of the person espousing the cause
 - and it becomes a bone of contention....
- So was the reaction to Jesus - at first a crowd, but then a mob...
- Notice something that Isaiah is slipping in here - the changing reaction of those who have faith:
 - we esteemed (past tense) him not - but, by implication, that has changed!
 - we were not attracted to him (v.2) - but again, by implication, that has changed!
- So, there is always this question: how do we react to Jesus? Worship, enquiry, rejection?

(53:4) Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. (53:5) But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (53:6) We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

- Up to this point, not much evidence of any effect of the servant's life or suffering
 - but now it becomes clear!
- Here is the heart of Isaiah's vision of the coming, suffering, servant Messiah!
 - and what a glorious picture it is!
- He was alone in his suffering
 - v.4 - he suffered - we didn't, we looked on
 - v.5 - emphasis is on he suffered, as distinct from us
 - v.6 - we went astray, the Lord acts as High Priest laying on the servant the iniquity - but it is the servant who suffers.
- He acted by means of substitution:
 - v.4 - takes our load; places himself in the position of the one who carries it
 - v.5 - image shifts to one of penal substitution, taking the punishment due to us
- He acted to deal with every aspect of our need
 - v.4 - with the infirmities and sorrows that blight our lives
 - v.5 - with the moral and spiritual wrong and guilt that alienates us from God
 - and positively, he brings healing and peace
- His work of suffering fulfilled the will of God
 - while we strayed, the servant's willing sin bearing was met by the divine action of the Lord placing our sin on him

(53:7) He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (53:8) By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. (53:9) He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

- These verses speak of the extent of his suffering, and of the manner in which he bore that suffering:
 - incredible that this was written 600 years or so before Jesus' crucifixion!!
- Silence - so often Jesus condemned his accusers by his silence!
- Lamb to slaughter - whole Passover imagery; Jesus died at Passover
- "By oppression and judgement" - apparently very wide range of possible meaning in the Hebrew, but the suspicion is that it suggests "without due process of law"
- "And who can speak of his descendants?" is another phrase where the NIV

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maybe doesn't quite capture it:

- it seems to more like "and as for his contemporaries, [descendants] who of them pondered [speak] the significance of his death? (None!)"
- none pondered it, and it was only by revelation that the truth became clear
- In the Hebrew, "wicked" is plural and "rich" is singular; this creates a bit of problem:
 - not a simple comparison between the rich and the wicked, otherwise the number would be the same
 - answer seems to be that in his death a rich man and wicked people were involved - **only too true of Jesus!**

(53:10) Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. (53:11) After the suffering of his soul, 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. (53:12) 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.

- Final chunk wraps up all the threads of what has gone before!
 - "guilt offering" (v.10) - a sin-bearing sacrifice which removes sin and imputes righteousness; cf earlier thought of penal substitution!
 - identification with us - "numbered with the transgressors" (v.12)
- Final result: the servant is triumphant through sin-bearing
 - didn't start out auspiciously, but end result was triumph!
 - transformed our situation by taking our sin and granting to us righteousness;
 - his own situation is transformed for God gives to him "a portion among the great"

Conclusion

- How has our reaction changed to the suffering servant, the one who took our infirmities, by whose stripes we are healed?
 - do we move from the on-lookers who were appalled, find him uncomfortable and unlovely...
 - ...to the worshipers who know that their very life depends on his triumph?
- Meditate on his saving work, in our place:
 - communion!