

Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

October 24, 2012

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

Psalm 91; **Isaiah 53:4–12**; Hebrews 4:12–16; Mark 10:35–45

Background and Context

God is majestically presented throughout Isaiah 40–55 in contrast to the human-made gods of Babylon, the nation who had defeated and enslaved Israel. These chapters are meant to comfort Israel during this time, ultimately with the promise that God will rescue them from exile when God returns to Zion as king (52:1–12). The unexpected surprise is that this will be accomplished through the work of the servant of the Lord (52:13–53:12); his suffering and shameful death will be the means by which, somehow, Israel is rescued, the covenant is renewed (54), and creation is restored (55).

Our passage (53:4–12) is the latter portion of the Fourth Servant Song in Isaiah, which begins at 52:13 with “Look, my servant will succeed! He will be elevated, lifted high, and greatly exalted.” This passage is well known due to the fact that New Testament writers depict the life and ministry of Jesus in terms of the suffering servant (e.g., Matt 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32–33; 1 Pet 2:21–25). In Isaiah, the suffering servant is both a reference to Israel and to one who stands in for Israel, doing for the people through his suffering what they cannot do for themselves.

Isaiah 53:4–12 (NET)

⁴ But he lifted up our illnesses, he carried our pain;
even though we thought he was being punished,
attacked by God, and afflicted for something he had done.

⁵ He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins;
he endured punishment that made us well;
because of his wounds we have been healed.

⁶ All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path,
but the Lord caused the sin of all of us to attack him.

⁷ He was treated harshly and afflicted, but he did not even open his mouth.
Like a lamb led to the slaughtering block, like a sheep silent before her shearers,
he did not even open his mouth.

⁸ He was led away after an unjust trial—but who even cared?
Indeed, he was cut off from the land of the living;
because of the rebellion of his own people he was wounded.

⁹ They intended to bury him with criminals, but he ended up in a rich man’s tomb,
because he had committed no violent deeds, nor had he spoken deceitfully.

¹⁰ Though the Lord desired to crush him and make him ill, once restitution is made, he will see descendants and enjoy long life, and the Lord's purpose will be accomplished through him.

¹¹ Having suffered, he will reflect on his work, he will be satisfied when he understands what he has done. "My servant will acquit many, for he carried their sins.

¹² So I will assign him a portion with the multitudes, he will divide the spoils of victory with the powerful, because he willingly submitted to death and was numbered with the rebels, when he lifted up the sin of many and intervened on behalf of the rebels."

Commentary

Our passage can be divided into three sections: (1) the reason for the servant's suffering (53:4–6); (2) the injustice of the servant's suffering (53:7–9); and (3) the outcome of the servant's suffering (53:10–12). Unfortunately, comments will have to be brief.

First, though initially presumed that God's judgment was the reason for the servant's suffering, Isaiah makes clear that it is because of Israel's sin. His suffering is not divine judgment, but human injustice. This recognition leads to the confession that Israel is guilty for his suffering, and that their healing is the gracious work of the servant. Second, having assessed the situation accurately, Israel is now able to speak truly concerning the nature of the servant's suffering: he has neither done wrong nor spoke falsely, but has rather suffered and died by the oppression and injustice of others. Third, God is pleased that the servant intercedes on behalf of Israel even to the point of death because through his suffering Israel's sins are forgiven and the nation is restored.

Discussion Questions

1. What questions did this passage raise in your mind?
2. Which part of this passage convicts you the most? Inspires you the most? Why?
3. What part of this passage is difficult to understand?
4. Read this week's Gospel reading, Mark 10:35–45. What connections between these two passages—Isaiah 53:4–12 and Mark 10:35–45—do you notice? Based on these two passages, what is the challenge for the followers of Jesus today?
5. What did you learn about God from this passage?
6. Regardless of where your faith is at right now, if you were to apply what we learned about God to something in your life this week, what would that be?

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.