

# A CHAPTER OF SURPRISES

## ISAIAH 53:1-12

Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes 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; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked - but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Once, a fire and brimstone preacher visited a local church. He was a passionate man with a demonstrative style. He pranced around the platform, returning to the podium in time to pound it with his fist. But one Sunday he had a problem with the lapel mic. The *“leash-like cord”* restricted his movement. Throughout his sermon the preacher pulled, tugged, dodged, and danced around - constantly adjusting the microphone cord. It was an obvious bother to him.

Finally, toward the end of his sermon he gathered up as much slack in the cord as he could to make a dramatic lunge at the congregation. Arms waving, fingers pointing, his voice screeched, *“Repent!”* That’s when a little boy leaned over and whispered to his father, *“Dad, will he hurt us if he gets loose?”*

Trust me, growing up in southern churches, I’ve witnessed a few preachers who caused me to think – *if this guy gets loose somebody is going to get hurt!* Fiery, angry, demonstrative preachers give you the impression they’re mad at the world. Their voice, and cadence, and mannerisms come across semi-violent. *And as a kid I assumed that must be God’s attitude.* I feared Him, but for all the wrong reasons. I figured if God got loose He might hurt someone. *If you’ve ever had that notion about God you need to study Isaiah 53.*

In this chapter God gets loose alright. He leaves the halls of heaven – gets loose on earth. And yes, the scene becomes bloody and violent... Verse 10 is the chapter's key verse – it tells us, **“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise...”** God used His belt! He took off His gloves, and landed a punch. Don't tell D-FACs, but God's spanking caused a bruise.

But who did He bruise? *Not you. Not me. God knows we deserve a good whipping* - but it was never God's intention to lay a hand on any of us. This is so shocking – so stunning - no matter how many times I read it I'm always astonished... When God's Son was let loose on Earth, God didn't move to bruise the sinner. It pleased the Father in heaven to bruise His only Son. It's beyond our wildest imagination, *but God bruised the Savior, not the sinner.*

In fact, that's not the only surprise in Isaiah 53. It's *a chapter full of surprises...* It tells me when the Savior appeared... It depicts His countenance... It describes His reception, and portrays His demeanor... It shows the Savior's calm in the midst of the storm... It reveals the circumstances of His death... His eventual resurrection... It even exposes His scars. *Oh, those scars... the bruises, the stripes, the wounds...*

Chapter 53's biggest surprise is its explanation of those scars. We find when God got loose on earth, rather than hurt us, He hurt His own Son so we could be pardoned, and cured, and comforted forever. This chapter proves for all time that God is not angry and mad at us. He doesn't want to harm, or judge, or condemn us to hell. He's literally *dying to be our friend*. And if we let Him, He'll shoulder our burden. He'll obtain for us the help we need. Let me share with you this evening a few of the surprises I find in Isaiah 53...

First, notice in verse 2, **“For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground.”** Jesus came to earth in a dry, arid, barren season. If you'd been around at that time in history you might not have noticed the dryness. Rome dominated the world politically... Athens cast the long shadow of Greek culture... Jerusalem was the capitol of religion... Secular historians refer to the first century AD as *a golden age* - but spiritually speaking the landscape was dusty, and barren, and bleak, and infertile.

Until John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness there had not been a prophetic voice in Israel for 400 years. Heaven had been silent for over four centuries. Pharisee-ism and hypocrisy had a vice-grip on Israel. Prejudice made them ineffective at reaching their neighbors. The Jewish preoccupation was *political liberation*, not *spiritual growth*. Rather than *worship God*, they *used God* to promote their own agenda. Dry, crusty, un-plowed hearts awaited Jesus.

Why didn't God turn Jesus loose on the earth at a more opportune time - in the glory days of the Hebrew prophets... or during the reign of King David... or on the heels of Moses and the Exodus? *God doesn't tell us*. All we know is that spiritually speaking, God sent Jesus into the world at low tide. The most beautiful and fruitful flower the world had seen, sprung up out of the ugliest, most desolate desert. *Christianity rose from obscurity - from underdog status to change the world.*

Isaiah calls Jesus a **“tender plant.”** He was alive, and eager, and growing. He loved life. He loved people. *Surprisingly*, hope eternal sprung out of the barren ground of a village called Nazareth. Spiritual fruit eventually sprouted from the life and ministry of Jesus. But here's another surprise. Notice, Isaiah mentions Jesus' physical appearance in the last half of verse 2... **“He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.”** Here's another shocker... Jesus wasn't six feet tall, blonde hair, blue eyes, bulging biceps - *leading man looks* - a Matthew Mogaheya persona? If God were coming to earth, you'd think He would look like a hunk! The Hebrew word

translated “*form*” means “a striking profile” - “*comeliness*” means “beauty” – and according to Isaiah, Jesus had neither. It’s funny to see pictures of Jesus where He looks like a red-headed Irishman. Jesus was Jewish. I’m sure with Jewish features.

I have a book in my library called “*The Archko Volume.*” It’s a collection of old documents found tucked away in the back recesses of the Vatican. It’s content is suspect at best - but in it there’s a supposed physical description of our Lord Jesus... It reads, “*He is the picture of His mother, only He has not her smooth, round face... He is tall, and His shoulders are a little drooped. His visage is thin and of a swarthy complexion (dark and dusky)... His eyes are large, and soft blue, and rather dull and heavy. The lashes are long, and His eyebrows very large. His nose is that of a Jew. In fact, He reminds me of an old-fashioned Jew in every sense of the word.*” We have no idea if the description is authentic, but it squares nicely with Isaiah’s observation, “*He has no form or comeliness... that we should desire Him.*”

This is why Jesus could blend in and slip through a crowd... This is why Judas had to identify Jesus with a kiss... He had no physical features that set Him apart. *God’s Son* looked like an *ordinary Joe*. It seems *Jesus came to win the world, not some beauty contest.*

If you were the type of person who measured a man by appearance, you would’ve ignored God’s Son. He wasn’t dashing - or attractive - or a heart-throb. When people flocked to Jesus it wasn’t because of His *good-looks*, it was because of His *good-ness*. Jesus wasn’t just another pretty face. He grabbed our attention not with *show*, but with *substance*. The force of His character and kindness - His virtue and purity... His fierce devotion to truth, yet His incredible displays of love... this is what drew people to Jesus. *This is what still draws people...*

If you were walking down the streets of Jerusalem, and bumped into Jesus, you would’ve been surprised by his nondescript appearance. *Is this God’s Son?* Our Lord Jesus didn’t just provoke a second glance. His appeal was deeper. He touched a part within us that lies dormant. Jesus awakened a spiritual hunger.

Verse 3 also surprises us, “*He is despised and rejected by men...*” God visited, and He was rejected. John 1:11 says it best, “*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*” Jesus was God, and backed it up with prophetic and miraculous proof, yet the Jews recoiled at His claims because He didn’t look the part.

The Greek gods were colossal, muscular, beautiful. But Jesus looked like common even for a mortal. Jesus claimed to be God, but was despised by His fellow Jews. They saw His appearance *and agenda* as the antithesis of what anyone would expect from God.

At the time, the Jews were in a political struggle with Rome. They longed for freedom and independence. They were seeking military intervention. What surprised them was Jesus could care less about what *they wanted*. He cared about their heart.

Does it ever bother you that sometimes Jesus could care less about the issues which preoccupy you? You’re struggling to get rich - or be successful - or climb the ladder... while Jesus stays focused on peace in your heart, love for your neighbor, responsibility toward your family... He cares about integrity and truth.

On the one hand it surprises me to read - Jesus was “**despised and rejected by men**” - but then I remember my own heart, and how far I’m able to stray from God’s priorities, and it really doesn’t surprise me at all. God’s Son paid the world a visit, and we were so out of sync with His will, we “**despised and rejected**” Him.

Here’s another surprise. Look at Jesus’ demeanor. There’s a tear in His eye – a grimace on His face. He’s “**a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.**” This is shocking to me. God is the pure essence of joy! When He made the world He said that *it was good*. He was happy, satisfied, pleased with His creation, yet when He re-entered His original domain in the person of Jesus, He saw so many things that were *not good* that He wepted at the damaged sin had done.

Understand, Jesus lived on this planet in it’s fallen state with the clear knowledge of how God meant life to be from the beginning. Everywhere Jesus turned He saw the contrast of *what is* with *what should be*. And it caused an unrelenting sorrow... This is why Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus... This is why in the Garden of Gethsemane He shed tears like thick drops of blood... This is why He stood over Jerusalem and wepted over Israel’s stubbornness... In Matthew 23, Jesus cried out, “**How often I wanted to gather you children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.**” It’s surprising indeed, that the *Lord of life*, the *Prince of Peace*, the *King of Joy* was also “**a man of sorrows.**”

Isaiah 53 also surprises us with certain details of Jesus’ death. Remember, Isaiah is writing prophecy. He occupies a place on the timeline that’s 700 years prior to Jesus. Yet He looks ahead to Calvary’s cross... In verse 12 He writes, Jesus will be “**numbered with the transgressors.**” One day on Mount Calvary you’ll see Jesus hanging on a cross between two thieves.

It reminds me of the old preacher on his death bed. He asked the nurse to call for his doctor and lawyer so *he could die in peace*. She thought that’s a strange request - how could having a doctor and a lawyer present help anyone die in peace - but she complied. When the men arrived the preacher positioned them on either side of his bed. He said to the nurse, “**Now I can die like my Lord Jesus... between two thieves.**”

Notice too, Isaiah surprises us with Jesus’ reaction to the accusations against Him and His trial before Pilate. Verse 7 tells us, “**He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.**” Jesus endured His interrogation without becoming defensive – without resorting to self-preservation. Matthew tells us even Pilate “**marveled greatly**” at the poise and composure of Jesus. He was obviously marching to a different drummer. Deep inside Jesus knew the cross was the will of God. The Roman tribunal was simply a tool in the hands of providence.

Verse 9 reveals another surprising revelation. Isaiah tells us that Jesus was laid in a rich man’s grave. And the Gospels affirm this prophecy. There was a rich Jew who believed in Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea volunteered his own tomb for the burial of the body. Legend has it, when Joseph approached the Roman governor with his desire to bury Jesus in his own tomb, Pilate questioned him. “**Joseph, why would you want to give up an expensive tomb to a common criminal?**” Joseph answered, “**Hey, it’s no big deal - He’s only going to need it for the weekend!**” And He was right!

Surprisingly, Isaiah even predicts Jesus' resurrection. We're told in verse 10, "When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed (or His offspring), He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand." Jesus' triumph over death did prolong His days. He lives today! He's as active as ever. He's still at work healing hearts and saving souls. *We have become His offspring. We're born again!* And one day He'll return to Earth to fulfill all God's good pleasure.

Which brings us to Isaiah 53's most surprising revelation – *those scars! The Savior's incredible scars!* On display in Rome, at St. Peter's Basilica, is Michelangelo's masterpiece, *The Pieta*. The famous sculpture depicts Mary, holding in her arms the body of her crucified Son. The sculpture is so life-like. When you see it, you're amazed that so much passion and tenderness could be captured in a chunk of cold stone. Once a tour group was standing in front of the world famous sculpture when a little girl whispered to her mother, "What in the world have they done to Jesus?" The mom put her finger to her lips to prompt her little girl to be quiet, but the girl was too wrapped up in what she was seeing. She repeated her question with more force, "What in the world have they done to Jesus?"

And when I read Isaiah 53 I ask the same question. How could they have been so cruel? – so calloused? What were they thinking when they hammered spikes through His flesh, or raked the scourge across His back? What kind of madness overcame them? *What in the world have they done to Jesus?*

*Here's a shocker.* In verse 5, Isaiah pens an awful, heartbreaking description, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." Here the Hebrew words paint a more vivid picture. They show us the force of the text... "Wounded" means "pierced or perforated." Jesus' body was punctured in at least seven places – His two hands, two feet, His brow, His back, and His side. The term "bruised" can be translated "beaten to pieces." Recall how the Romans struck Jesus' face with their open hands. They battered and bruised Him. "The chastisement" referred to the formal beating He endured. He was pummeled with a leather whip. Nine thongs, with little bits of jagged metal or ivory, dug into His skin with each strike. The custom was 39 lashes. His torso looked like the scraps of leftover turkey after Thanksgiving dinner - *once the carver does his job.*

Let me show you another surprise. Turn back to 52:14. Isaiah says, "His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men..." OT scholars, Kiel and Delitzsch, translate this verse, "So disfigured, His appearance was not human, and His form not like that of the children of men." Apparently, the face and body of Jesus was so butchered He no longer resembled a human being.

Isaiah 50:6 provides us surprising details of the crucifixion we don't even have in the Gospels. Jesus is quoted as saying, "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting." They plucked out His beard, and spit in His face. The angry Jews and Roman executioners, didn't just kill Jesus - they tried to maim and torture Him in the process. Their goal was to inflict pain - not just death.

Jesus looked like a heavyweight boxer who just went 15 rounds... Or a burn victim... Or a body mangled in an airplane crash... His face was a massive whelp. Jesus was bloodied, and swollen, and beaten. If there'd been a funeral, there's no doubt it would've been *closed casket*. No one could've bared to look. Perhaps this was the reason Mary failed recognize Jesus after He rose from the dead. We know after His resurrection Jesus bore the scars of crucifixion in His hands and feet. He showed those scars to Thomas. So why wouldn't He still bear the facial scars?

*Here's a surprise - yet future.* One day, when we see Jesus for the very first time, we'll all be in for a shock. In Revelation 5 John was transported to heaven. He looked for redeemer who could save the world. He was told "the Lion of the tribe of Judah... has prevailed." But when he turned to see the Lion, he was surprise. He saw "a Lamb as tough it had been slain." Apparently, Jesus appeared as a sacrificed Lamb.

I believe when we look into Jesus' face we'll see the terrible scars – and we'll instantly know just how much He endured for us. *We'll never doubt His love again.* Charles Spurgeon describes the emotion, "Stand at the foot of the cross, and count the purple drops by which you have been cleansed: see the thorn-crown; mark His scourged shoulders, still gushing with encrimsoned rills... And if you do not lie prostrate on the ground before that cross, you have never seen it." Here's a riddle, "What's the only man-made thing in heaven?" And the answer, "The scars of Jesus." And oh, how we should love and cherish those scars.

There's one more surprise in this chapter, and it's the most shocking of them all. Look again at verse 5, *He was wounded, yes. He was bruised, yes.* But why? It was "for our transgressions" - "for our iniquities." It wasn't the Romans or the Jews who nailed Jesus to the cross. He bore in His body *my sin, and your sin.*

It reminds me of the little boy who went to church with his dad on Easter. His father wanted to teach Him the significance of the day. The dad said to his son, "Jesus died because people nailed Him to a cross." That's when the little boy's eyes widened. He looked over the church, and said, "You mean, *these people?*" The right answer would've been "Yes, *these people.*"

Verse 4, "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows..." And verse 6, "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." Here's the heart of this surprising chapter. Isaiah 53 tells us Jesus' death on the cross was *substitutionary.*

He was beaten and tortured and executed not because of something He did. He died in our place. He bore on His shoulders your sin. All your foul-ups – all your acts of rebellion – all the little sins that go unnoticed by everyone other than God. All the sins you commit because you're so use to committing them you don't even recognize them as sin. All of our junk – the garbage of the whole world - was collected in one can and shoved onto His truck.

Imagine, the frightful moment when that heavy load fell on Jesus' innocent shoulders. The sin of the world was thrust on a man who'd never known a single sin. The sin of the rapist, the serial killer, the extortionist, the child molester, the suicide bomber, the abortionist... Even *your sin* and *my sin* - was gathered up together and thrust onto the crucified Christ. We'll never grasp the shock that was to His system, and the pain He felt.

This is why it's foolish to think that you or I or anyone else can ever be good enough to get to heaven. If you could be, then Jesus died in vain. Do you think God would allow His Son to suffer a crucifixion unless it was absolutely necessary? It reminds me of the good ole boy who spent his whole life on the run from God. He had ignored Jesus. Yet he figured since he'd never robbed a bank, or murdered anybody – He didn't really belong in hell. He was sure God would make an exception for him.

One night he had a dream. He was standing in line at heaven's gate, right behind Mother Teresa. Here was a woman who had sacrificed all the world's comforts to minister selflessly to the poorest of the poor on the streets of Calcutta. Yet his heart sank when he heard God say, "Sorry Teresa, I was really expecting a lot more out of you!" Not even Mother Teresa of Calcutta can measure up to God's standards. Notice again verse 6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way..." Every mother's child is guilty before God... And this is why you and I need Jesus.

Here's another surprise. We all know sin carries a serious penalty. That's why we punish ourselves. Folks involve themselves in destructive patterns of behavior because they don't think they deserve the life God offers. They don't reach for God's help because they feel unworthy of His love. Some of you have been beating yourself up for years. You're haunted by feelings of inadequacy. Understand, *you* can punish yourself over and over, but you'll never make the feelings of guilt go away.

Please listen again to Isaiah. The answer is found in these surprising words, "By His stripes we are healed." "The chastisement for our peace was upon Him." Jesus bore in His body the punishment for all the hideous things you've done. *Now that you know that*, for you to punish yourself any longer is to belittle and doubt the work of Jesus. It's time to lay your guilt to rest - and trust once for all in the pardon Jesus offers.

In his classic book "Pilgrim's Progress," John Bunyan writes of the liberating moment in every Christian's life. "I saw that just as Christian came up to the Cross, his burden loosed from his shoulders, fell off his back, and landed in the grave. Then was Christian glad and lightsome - and said with a merry heart, 'He has given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.'"

The great church father, Jerome, lived in Bethlehem solely because it was the birthplace of Jesus. He labored daily to make himself worthy of God's favor. One night he had a dream where Jesus paid him a visit. Jerome collected all his money and offered it as a gift. But Jesus told him, "I don't want your money." He rounded up his possessions and offered them to Jesus. But Jesus said, "I don't want your possessions." Frantically, Jerome turned to Jesus and asked him, "Lord, what can I give you? What do you want?" And Jesus replied, "Give me your sin. That's what I came for; I came to take away your sin. Give me your sin."

And this is what Jesus wants from you tonight... In your heart of hearts, if you'll come to the cross right now, and behold the Man suffering there for you. If you'll roll your burden (*whatever it is, no matter how heavy it might be*) over onto His shoulders - and believed that He's paid its price - a change will occur! You'll be different. You'll be *glad and lightsome*.

Turn your sin over to Jesus once and for all, and you'll be forgiven and set free. The moment you trust in His stripes... *those surprising scars... healing begins*. I'm so sure of God's promise, your cleansing and cure is the one thing tonight *that won't be a surprise!*