



ISAIAH Session 3/5
Isaiah chapter 53
The suffering servant

To begin

Share your experiences with one another of how the teaching from last week has shaped your thoughts & actions in the past week.

Opening prayer

- You might want to light a candle and then open this time together with the prayer below, or use your own.

God of all comfort,
where we are stuck, release us,
where we have given up hope, inspire us.
Where we focus only on ourselves,
help us to see the needs of others;
transform us by your Spirit to be the people you have called us to be,
spreading your love and proclaiming your presence throughout the world.
We ask this through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Hearing and understanding God's word

- **Ask someone in the group to read, or share the reading of Isaiah chapter 53**

Overview of Isaiah 40 – 55

For many Christians, these chapters contain their favourite Bible prophecies. They reveal themes and characters easily recognisable in the New Testament. It has long been acknowledged that there are a number of passages in Isaiah 40-55 that have a common theme and focus - a person called 'the servant of the Lord'. Each of the passages says different things about the servant.

Corporate personality: this is a phrase used by theologians to talk about the way the Bible speaks about one person representing many people. Probably the most famous example in the Bible is in Romans 5, where Paul seems to argue that all humanity existed in Adam and sinned in Adam. In these servant passages in Isaiah, the servant sometimes seems to be a particular individual but in other places seems to be the nation of Israel.

The book of Isaiah reveals to us a crucial stage in God's purposes for his world. Up to this point, the Bible could be summarised in the manner outlined below:

1. God created the world for his glory and purposes.
2. The book of Genesis shows how God called out one nation from all humanity.
3. This nation also failed to live up to expectations. By the Spirit of God, the prophets began to understand that Israel's task would not be fulfilled by the nation as a whole but by a godly remnant within the nation.
4. In Isaiah 40-55, this remnant is further reduced to one godly individual.
5. The fulfilment of God's mandate by one ideal Israelite will, in turn, enable all Israel to fulfil its mandate to the whole world and indeed, to all creation.

The New Testament writers had no doubt about the One in whom the servant passages were fulfilled - it was Jesus.

The servant passages can, therefore, be seen as an Old Testament summary of the gospel. In Jesus, what Israel had failed to do is accomplished.

In Isaiah 53, the best known of the 'servant songs', we meet God's suffering servant, who suffers pain and death to redeem guilty people from their sins. Whatever the precise meaning in Isaiah's mind, Christians have naturally identified the suffering servant with Jesus.

We are now part of God's purpose for the world. – a servant people. It is through living out the gospel and sharing the gospel that the love of God is made known to the world – people are brought back into the relationship with God that he intended us all to enjoy.

Word and Spirit

In this study of Isaiah you are invited to let the Holy Spirit be your teacher, asking the Spirit to

1. highlight the scriptures
2. show you what you need to do
3. give you his strength to fulfil what he shows you
 - **Reread Isaiah 53 ready to answer the following questions**

- Is there a phrase or a sentence that especially speaks to you? You may like to share it with the group and if you can say why you like it.
- What descriptions are given about Jesus' suffering and death on the cross in this prophecy written hundreds of years before it actually happened? How does it reveal God's love?

Now read **Acts 8.26-35** as in the passage we see Isaiah 53 being used to share the gospel.

Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group:

1. Pretend you are Philip. What would you have told the eunuch after explaining that the passage was about Jesus?
2. While you may or may not have the same evangelistic opportunities as Philip in Acts 8, when do you have opportunities to naturally introduce Jesus into the conversation?
3. Who are the people you would like to have opportunities to talk to about Jesus?
4. What would you like to tell them?

Praying and acting on God's word

Give thanks to God that Jesus became a servant. Praise God for his forgiveness of our sins and in making us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Ask God to provide you with opportunities to speak about Jesus and the right words to say. It would be a great idea to spend some time each week praying for people God lays on your heart.

You might want to say together the prayer you began with and then blow the candle out to end the session.

Suggestion

Why not use a Good Friday hymn as part of your time together (eg When I survey the wondrous cross; There is a green hill; How deep the Father's love)