

7th May 2023

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

The Suffering and Glory of the Servant

¹³ See, my servant will act wisely;

he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

¹⁴ Just as there were many who were appalled at him—

his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

¹⁵ so he will sprinkle many nations,

and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

For what they were not told, they will see,

and what they have not heard, they will understand.

53 Who has believed our message

and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

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.

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,

a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces

he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain

and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,

stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,

each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

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 its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

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.

¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

¹¹ 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.

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.

Matthew 20:17-28

Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time

¹⁷ Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸ "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

A Mother's Request

²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him.

²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

²² "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Sermon: Greatness is Serving (Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and Matthew 20:17-28)

Please have your **Bibles** open initially at **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** and then **Matthew 20:17-28**.

You should have a **sermon outline** to take notes if you wish.

Let me **pray** first...

Context/Intro

In our **series** looking at **Matthew's** Gospel

[Slide 1-Context]

- We saw 2 weeks ago a **rich young man** - who seems to be great in the eyes of everyone - yet he **walked away from Jesus sad** – because even though the rich young man **kept the commandments** – when **Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor** – he couldn't do that - because he **loved his wealth more than God**
- We also saw the Apostle **Peter** thought that **he's great** because **he and the other disciples** have **given everything up to follow Jesus**
- **Peter** even thought - because they've done that – they must be **great** – and he asked Jesus back in 19:27 - basically “***what's in it for us – for following you, Jesus?***” – after all Peter and the other 11 are Jesus' first followers
- **Jesus' reply** was to say – **yes there are rewards** – but **things in my kingdom operate a bit different than you think** – in my kingdom – **the first are last and the last are first** –
- And we left Jesus last week where he **told a parable about workers in a vineyard** – to **illustrate the concept** of the first being last and the last being first

- In that parable – the **first workers** who worked all day **got the same pay as** the **last workers** who worked only one hour
- This really is an **upside-down kingdom**
- Have the disciples really understood the parable or not?
- We should also throw in for good measure that the **disciples** do have a bit of a track record for thinking – that by following Jesus – **they are in a very privileged position** – and that that somehow makes them great
- In fact, they've **argued amongst themselves about who's the greatest** (Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46) and even asked Jesus back in Matthew 18 **who was the greatest?**
- Jesus is again about to turn things upside down as we look at this morning's passage from Matthew 20:17-28
- Jesus redefines greatness

[Slide 2-3 points]

I have 3 points this morning:

1. Greatness is – **doing the will of The Father** (Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and Matthew 20:17-21)
2. Greatness is – **drinking the cup of suffering** (Matthew 20:20-23)
3. Greatness is – **being a servant to others** (Matthew 20:24-28)

Greatness is doing the will of the Father (Isaiah 52:13-53:12 & Matt 20:17-21)

1st then – ***greatness is doing the will of the Father***

[Slide 3-Will]

What we need to understand about **Jesus** is that:

He **left the glory of Heaven** – to come to **Earth** on a **rescue mission**

That was **God the Father's plan** – and Jesus the **Son** always **does the Father's will**

But that rescue mission **came at a great cost to God the Father** – who allowed His only Son to suffer – and it **came at a great cost to Jesus**.

From our Old Testament reading from **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** – [please turn there now](#) – the **Prophet Isaiah** – some 700 years before Jesus is born (740-701BC) – **predicts what will happen to Jesus**

As we look briefly at this passage from **Isaiah** – it's a **picture of Jesus** – as a **suffering servant King** – on a cruel cross

52:13 – **Jesus** is God the **Father's servant**

52:14 – **People** were **appalled** at **Jesus' appearance** – He was **disfigured**

52:15 – **Jesus' blood** will be **sprinkled** on **many nations** – His **sacrifice is available to all people of all nations** – if they care to believe in Him

53:3 – He was **despised and rejected** – even by His own people. He is a **man of suffering** and **familiar with pain**

53:4 – He **took our pain** and **bore our suffering**. He was/is sinless – but we're sinful – and yet He **took the blame for us** – and was **punished instead of us**

53:5 – He was **pierced for our sins** – those **nails** in His **hands and feet** – were **meant for our hands and feet**

53:5 – And **His death** brought peace between humankind and God – because Jesus paid the **ultimate sacrifice for sin**

Because as 53:6 explains – we are like lost disobedient sheep who have wandered away from God – but Jesus the **Good Shepherd came looking for His lost sheep and found them and called them to Himself** – and He even laid down His life for His sheep.

Jesus did all that for us – because it was the **Father's will**

Surprisingly in this upside Kingdom there's glory in there too

Look at 52:13 – **Jesus is raised and lifted up and highly exalted**. Surprisingly, Jesus being lifted up on a cruel cross – **brings glory to God the Father** – because God's will has been done – and so Jesus is **exalted to the Highest place** – in Heaven and **seated at the right hand of the Father**.

Greatness is doing the Father's will

And as we turn to our **New Testament** passage – from **Matthew 20:17-28**

We see in verses 17 to 19

Jesus confirms what the **prophet Isaiah** said would happen

V17 – Jesus and His disciples are **heading to Jerusalem**

And there's only one purpose for Jesus going there

V18 – **Jesus will be delivered** over to the **religious leaders** – the chief priests and teachers of the law. He will be found guilty – and **condemned to death** – handed over to the Gentiles – which are the Roman authorities – He will be mocked and flogged and crucified on a cruel cross – just as Isaiah said. And then on the **third day he will be raised**.

This is the third time Jesus has told His disciples that He must die (Matthew 16:21 and Matthew 17:22-23) and it's the first time He **mentions that He will be crucified.**

Yet He willingly goes to Jerusalem to die for us – because it's the **Father's will.**

How does Jesus' actions - compare to - James and John and their mum?

In v20 and 21 - James and John's mum **asks Jesus to grant that her sons may sit on Jesus' right and left in His Kingdom.**

Before we give James and John and their proud mum too much of a hard time.

Back in 19:28 Jesus told the disciples - *Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Jesus has said the disciples will sit on thrones; so, James and John want prime positions next to Him.

However, it's surprising that their request comes immediately after Jesus predicts His death and comes after His teaching in 19:30 and 20:16 that the *"the last will be first and the first will be last"*

They haven't quite got the concept that **following Jesus comes at a cost; there is a cost of discipleship.**

Was what James and John and their mum asked for – God's will? Or their own will?

(pause)

Were they willing to follow Jesus and accept whatever happened or were they claiming privileges as His first followers?

What about us - are we doing God's will or our own?

How do we know what God's will for us is?

The **Bible!**

- Jesus summarised the commandments down to – ***loving God and loving one another*** (Matthew 22:36-40) – and He said that ***by loving people – everyone would know that we were His disciples*** (John 13:34-35). Are we doing the Father's will?
- Jesus said in John 6:40 – ***the will of the Father is that everyone who looks to the Son (Jesus) and believes in Him shall have eternal life and I will raise them all the last day.*** So, **God's will is that people get saved for Heaven**
- And Jesus told us to ***go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey Jesus*** (Matthew 28:19). Are we doing the Father's will?
- And Jesus told us ***the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few – and pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field*** (Matthew 9:37-38). Are we doing the Father's will?

(pause)

Jesus brings glory to His Father by doing the Father's will and finishing the work His Father gave Him (John 17:3)

By us following Jesus and doing the Father's will – it brings glory to Jesus (John 17:10) and His Father.

Greatness is doing the Father's will!

Greatness is – drinking the cup of suffering (Matthew 20:22-23)

2nd – **greatness is drinking the cup of suffering** – that’s in **verses 22 & 23**.

[Slide 4-suffering]

In response to James and John’s mum’s request for the best seats in Heaven
Look at Jesus’ reply in v22 -23 – and notice his reply is not just to the mum – he **answers the boys too!**

Jesus says - ***they don’t know what they are asking***

Jesus can’t grant them the best seats in Heaven – that’s up to God the Father

But as Jesus often does – Jesus answers their question with His own question

“Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

Often in the Old Testament God’s anger or wrath is described as ***“a cup of God’s anger/wrath”*** because of His people’s disobedience – and that ***“cup of anger/wrath”*** leads to “a cup of suffering” because the people rebelled. (Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 49:12)

Jesus is going to have to drink that cup of God’s anger on the cross when
God’s anger because of the sin of the world will be poured out on Jesus. And **Jesus will have to drink the cup of suffering** – as He is beaten, scourged and crucified – something Jesus prays about later in Matthew 26:39 – ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will”***

Jesus’ point to James and John is – ***‘are you prepared to suffer like me guys?’***

Rather than thinking about the best seats in Heaven – have you thought about what comes before that – when you follow me? Remember guys, this is an upside-down Kingdom – where the King is a suffering servant – and His followers can’t expect to follow Him without also suffering’

James and John both reply – v22 – that they CAN drink the cup of suffering.

And Jesus – v23 – **confirms they will.**

In fact, all the apostles were martyred except John.

We know from Acts 12:2 – that James was the first apostle to be martyred – **put to death with a sword by King Herod Agrippa I.**

And **John** although not martyred – **suffered greatly and lived a life exiled on the Island of Patmos**

It's easy for us to teach Jesus' once and for all sacrifice for sin – and to say **Jesus has rescued us from sin and death and given us a place in Heaven.** And of course, that teaching is paramount to the Christian Faith.

But we must NOT forget – and this is Jesus' point to James and John – we must NOT forget - to also teach and see that Jesus' life and sacrifice is an example for us to follow.

Obviously, we can't die for sins to be forgiven. But Jesus does call us: ***to take up our cross and follow Him*** (Matthew 16:24). Jesus does say that ***in this world we will have trouble*** (John 16:33). Jesus does say that ***we will be hated because we are His followers*** (Matthew 10:22).

When we stick to God's Word and follow God's commands and make a stand **we will cop insults, persecution and false accusations.**

When we act like a Christian – **we will be misunderstood** – even sometimes by fellow Christians – **who judge us wrongly and unfairly.**

But remember, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that - ***we are blessed when people insult us, persecute us and falsely say all kinds of evil against us because of Jesus*** (Matthew 5:10-12)

Greatness is drinking the cup of suffering.

Greatness is – being a servant to others (Matthew 20:24-28)

3rd – ***greatness is being a servant to others*** – that's **verses 24 to 28**

[Slide 5-Servant]

Again, Jesus turns things upside down

The other 10 disciples are pretty **cheesed off with James and John** for asking for the best seats in Heaven (v24)

But it's not because they think James and John have been rude for asking – **remember the disciples have argued amongst themselves about who's the greatest a few times. No, the other 10 disciples are jealous** – and perhaps annoyed that they didn't ask first!

So, Jesus gives them an example from the Gentile (non-Jewish) world – v25 – **where Gentile rulers lord it over them subjects** – with authority and harshness – just like the Roman rulers do.

But Jesus says - **His Kingdom is not like that** – v26.

Jesus says – v26-27 – in His Kingdom – ***those who are great or want to be great – are those who are servants – and if you want to be first – you must be a slave – not the boss.***

It's worth mentioning the **two Greek words** used here.

The Greek word for servant here is – ***diakonos*** – where we get our English word ***deacon*** – someone who serves. **Diakonos** also means *servant or minister*. So as a minister, I'm your **servant** – **not a boss** [and you should rebuke me if I do act like a boss]

And the Greek word for slave here is – ***doulos*** – **You may have heard of a *doula*** – a *doula* is a person who assists and supports a mother during childbirth – a slave to the mother if you like.

This idea of a follower of Jesus being a servant - **is a lot different to the world, isn't it?**

In a world - geared towards climbing the ladder and being successful and having people working under you – Jesus is saying – **no, no – in my Kingdom – if you want to be successful and attain greatness – you're a servant to everyone else.**
An example of this is the way we serve the Lord's Supper – **the elders serve the congregation – I serve the elders – and the elders serve me!**

And if we want the **ultimate example** of servanthood.

Jesus concludes in verse 28

He says: ***“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***

Two things we can get from this:

1st - Jesus came to serve us – as His followers we must imitate Him – **and also serve others**

2nd - **Jesus gave His life as ransom.** *A ransom is a payment to release someone who has been kidnapped.* **We have been kidnapped by sin and death – and Jesus pays the ultimate price for our release – with His life.**

As His followers, we are called to give up our lives too. We may not have to die for Jesus' sake [though some people do] – but we do need to die to self – and not think too highly of ourselves - and serve others – and put their interests ahead of ours (Romans 12:1-21)

When we do serve others – Jesus says - it's like we are doing it for Him
(Matthew 25:40)

Greatness is serving others!

(pause)

Challenges in Serving

Now this **idea of serving is a difficult concept** – so I thought it might be helpful to give a few challenges as a way forward:

- Is there some area of church life we could be serving in? – and we are not doing it? We just don't want to give up our time to do it? Is that God's will for us?

(pause)

- As we serve here at church – are we looking for accolades and rewards – yes, it's nice to be thanked – but our motivation should be to serve without expecting accolades and rewards – otherwise we are really serving ourselves!

(pause)

- As we serve here at church – **are we training people up to continue after us** – **or have we built an empire** – that we want to protect – and we don't let people in – **in case they are better than us** – and show us up? Remember we said last week – if God has blessed someone with a particular gift – **then we all get the benefit of it** – we shouldn't be jealous of them – **even if they are better than we are**

(pause)

- As we come to church – **is it just for ourselves or for others too**. Do we strike up **conversations?** Are we **interested in other people's lives?** Even if the topic is not something we're familiar with? *Are we quick to listen and slow to speak* (James 1:19) or are we **wanting to get our word in first** all the time? And as we come to church, are we judging others unfairly – *they may have a speck in their eye – and we have a log in our eye* (Matthew 7:3) Is that serving others?

(pause)

- **Is there a job at church that is beneath us?** Are we okay emptying the bins and sweeping the floor and cleaning the toilets – washing the tea towels – or do we only want to be on the Sunday Roster – during the service – doing the stuff out the front – where we get noticed? Remember, all are equal in Jesus' Kingdom.

Example [from Dick Lucas] of two women who always put the fruit and veg at the altar for the harvest festival – but minister asks them to re-cover the hymn books one year – and they had a canary and complained bitterly. Who were they serving?

(pause)

- To finish up then – **some people might not know what area they could serve** – so I have a **Spiritual Gifts/Skills survey** which will help you work out what gifts God has blessed you with and show the areas that you could be serving. It's been a few years since we last did this – and we have a number of new people. **If you'd like to fill out one and return to me – it will help you – and it will help me.**

Let's pray...

Father God, we thank you for Jesus who always did your will. Thank you that Jesus left Heavenly glory on a rescue mission and did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

Help us to examine our hearts whether we are doing your will and our own will. Help us to be prepared to drink the cup of suffering and take up our cross and follow Jesus.

Help us to consider how we can best serve others and in turn serve you.

We pray this in Jesus Name. Amen!