

The King of Zion and the Epicenter of God's Salvation *The Book of Isaiah*

The King Who Entered Our Sin and Suffering *Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12*

Introduction: Can We Be Healed?

In 1960, Israeli undercover agents pulled off one of the greatest kidnappings in history. They discovered the South American hideaway of one of the masterminds of the Nazi Holocaust, a man by the name of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann had presided over the slaughter of millions of Jews in the hideous Nazi Final Solution. Furthermore, he had personally executed a number of Jews himself. The undercover agents brought Eichmann to Israel to stand trial. Adolf Eichmann's deeds were well known to the Jews in Israel in 1960, when his trial took place, and a long line of witnesses were brought in to testify against him. As Eichmann sat in a small bulletproof glass booth, prosecutors called in a small, haggard Jewish man named Yehiel Dinur, who had miraculously escaped death in Auschwitz. Dinur, ready to testify, stared at the former Nazi mass murderer behind the glass, and the courtroom was silent, waiting for what Dinur would say about Eichmann, who was responsible for the deaths of his friends and beloved people. But no one was prepared for what happened next. Yehiel Dinur began to shout and sob, collapsing to the floor. What happened? Was he overcome by hatred? By horrible memories triggered by some evil in Eichmann's face? No. Dinur later explained in a '60 Minutes' interview that Eichmann was not the demon he expected. Instead, he was an ordinary man just like you and me. And in that moment, Yehiel Dinur came to the realization that sin and evil are the human condition. He said, 'I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable to do this...exactly like he.' Then Dinur concluded with a statement that shocked the world then and it shocks the world today: 'There is Eichmann in all of us.' In actuality, he was Dinur was simply affirming the deeply Jewish insight that runs through the book of Genesis to author William Golding, in his book *The Lord of the Flies*: There is a disease in us. Can we be saved from it? Psychologist Carl Jung in a BBC interview in 1959, agreed that there was a problem: 'We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself... We know nothing of man, far too little. His psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil.'

This is a personal issue, too. When I was in tenth grade, my parents started arguing about divorce. That was a really hard time for me. Early on, during a lunch period, I went to go talk to my old biology teacher who was really good at listening and really encouraging. I knew she would say things that would make me feel better. I told her what was happening at home. Sure enough, she said some really encouraging things. Then I went a bit further. I told her how I was trying to focus on school and swimming. I knew I was fishing. Being the nice person she was, she said, 'Mako, I really respect how you're trying to hold things together.' Then the bell rang. As I left the room, I heard a voice in my mind say, 'Mako, you can turn any situation to your advantage, can't you?' I thought, 'Who said that?' Over time, I came to see in myself and in the world that our human nature needed healing. And I also came to see that only Jesus even claimed to heal human nature.

Can There Really Be a Happy Ending to This Story?

I'm going to take us through a passage from the book of Isaiah, an amazing passage in which Christians see Jesus announced long before he came, but first I'd like to set the context. Long ago, many of the writers of the Hebrew Bible wondered the same thing. Why? Because they lived in a happy ending story. Historian Thomas Cahill writes a very easy to read book called *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*. He says:

'All evidence points to there having been, in the earliest religious thought, a vision of the cosmos that was profoundly cyclical... The Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking and experiencing, a new way of understanding and feeling the world, so much that it may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had.'¹

In other words, the Jewish people were the first people to believe a happy ending story. Why? Because they believed in a God who was 100% good. It's much easier to believe in a god that is both good and evil, or neither, because you look out at the world, and see that it has both good and evil. You look at us, and see that we do both

¹ Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), p.13 – 14

good and evil. So if there is a god, it's easier to believe that that god is both good and evil, or neither. But this God revealed Himself to Israel and started to tell a different story. And because this God is 100% good and personal and loving, He will one day defeat evil in the world. He will one day breathe new life into all of His creation. And that is what gave us Walt Disney. Just as every Disney movie ends with a happy ending, because good defeats evil, so goes the very first happy ending story. Cahill imagines the biblical character Abraham meeting other important figures to talk about this new hope in God. Cahill says,

'On every continent, in every society, Avram would have been given the same advice that wise men as diverse as Heraclitus, Lao-Tsu, and Siddhartha would one day give their followers: do not journey but sit; compose yourself by the river of life, meditate on its ceaseless and meaningless flow – on all that is past or passing or to come – until you have absorbed the pattern and have come to peace with the Great Wheel and with your own death and the death of all things in the corruptible sphere.'² 'But the God of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov – no longer your typical ancient divinity, no longer the archetypal gesturer – is a real personality who has intervened in real history, changing its course and robbing it of predictability.'³ 'For the Jews, history will be...always something new: a process unfolding through time, whose direction and end we cannot know, except insofar as God gives us some hint of what is to come.'⁴

So what is that future? How will this God, who is all good, heal humanity and *love the world into its happy ending*? We all know the basic plot line of the happy ending story. The hero defeats the villain. And in great epic stories, the hero goes through major suffering for the sake of others, or pays a price for others. Mulan suffers for her father and for China, and defeats the Mongols. In real life, King Leonidas and the 300 Spartans suffer when they fight the Persian Empire, and give their lives. Perhaps our most recent American hero, Martin Luther King, Jr. suffered as he helped lead the Civil Rights Movement. Just last week, I was in a meeting at Boston College where I was up front leading a discussion. Off to my right were a group of female college students, and one of them farted. The guys and girls to my left struggled to hold back their laughter. Afterwards, those on my left came up to me and said, 'Mako, you farted!' I said, 'No, actually that was....' But I was also studying this part of Isaiah and I thought, 'Fine, I'll be the hero.' So I said, 'Yeah, it was me; I farted.' I'll pay the price for someone else!

Text: The Prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah foresees a hero way bigger than that. This hero doesn't just defeat the villain. He defeats the disease in the villain and redeems the villain. Let's look at Isaiah. This particular scroll – called the Great Isaiah Scroll – was discovered in 1947 near the Dead Sea. It is part of the collection of Jewish scrolls called the Dead Sea Scrolls, and often tours museums around the world. In fact, twenty two copies of Isaiah have been discovered in the Dead Sea area alone.⁵ According to Jewish and Christian tradition, this man Isaiah – poet, prophet, and perhaps a statesman – lived in Jerusalem, around 730 years before Christ. But if you don't accept the traditional date, here's what we know: A team from the University of Arizona radiocarbon-dated the famous Book of Isaiah scroll at between 335 BCE and 122 BCE, and paleographers have dated this scroll at between 150 – 125 BCE.⁶ So at least 125 – 335 years before Jesus, this scroll, and twenty one others like it, existed. The prophecy of Isaiah was already holy Scripture. That is very significant.

A word to help us interpret Hebrew poetry: Hebrew poetry did not always rhyme sounds, like in English. They rhymed concepts. That's why we see that the first line of each couplet says one thing, and the second line and sometimes a third line intensifies it.

^{52:13} Behold, My Servant will prosper,
He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.

¹⁴ Just as many were astonished at you, My people, so His appearance was marred more than any man,
And His form more than the sons of men.

¹⁵ Thus He will sprinkle many nations;
Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him;
For what had not been told them they will see,
And what they had not heard they will understand.

² Ibid., p.74 – 75

³ Ibid., p.106

⁴ Ibid., p.142 – 143

⁵ Theodor H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Peter Smith Pub Inc, 1976)

⁶ <http://www.physics.arizona.edu/physics/public/dead-sea.html> published in 1995

^{53:1} Who has believed our message?
 And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
 And like a root out of parched ground;
 He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him,
 Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
³ He was despised and forsaken of men,
 A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
 And like one from whom men hide their face,
 He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
 And our sorrows He carried;
 Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
 Smitten of God, and afflicted.
⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
 He was crushed for our iniquities;
 The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
 And by His wounding we are healed.
⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;
 But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.
⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
 Yet He did not open His mouth;
 Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
 So He did not open His mouth.
⁸ By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
 And as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living
 For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?
⁹ His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death,
 Because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.
¹⁰ But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief;
 if He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
 He will see His offspring,
 He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.
¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied;
 By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many,
 As He will bear their iniquities.
¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
 And He will divide the booty with the strong;
 Because He poured out Himself to death,
 And was numbered with the transgressors;
 Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
 And interceded for the transgressors.

Christians regard this passage as referring to Jesus. This poem is quoted in all 4 Gospels, Acts, Romans, and 1 Peter 2 in some detail. It is one of the most precious sections of Scripture. Yet among the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe there was a rabbinical attempt to remove it from the Jewish Bible. However, the Sephardic Jews of Spain kept it in their Bible, and there it stays! Some have claimed that it was written after Jesus, because it was too good to be true. That was before 1947, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered and we found this copy of the Isaiah scroll!

Do Jewish scholars see this as referring to the Messiah? Here are some references. The Targum Jonathan interprets Isaiah 52:13 as, 'Behold, My Servant *the Messiah* will prosper.' The Targum was an expansion in Aramaic on the Hebrew Scriptures, and Targum Jonathan is the official eastern targum on the Prophets, from the Babylonian exile period, but its content reaches further back before the exile. It is still read in the Yemenite Jewish community. Rav Asher Soloff, in his Ph.D. thesis, *The Fifty Third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Commentators, to the Sixteenth Century* (Ph.D. Thesis, Drew University, 1967), writes on p. 146 'We know that messianic homilies based on Joseph's career (his saving role preceded by suffering), and using Isaiah 53 as the prophetic portion, were preached in certain old synagogues which used the triennial cycle...' The great medieval rabbi Maimonides in the

12th century wrote that Isaiah 53 referred to the Messiah: ‘What is to be the manner of Messiah’s advent, and where will be the place of his appearance?... Isaiah speaks similarly of the time when he will appear... as a root out of the dry earth, etc... in the words of Isaiah, when describing the manner in which the kings will hearken to him, At him kings will shut their mouth; for that which had not been told them have they seen, and that which they had not heard they have perceived.’⁷ And the 13th century rabbi Nachmanides reluctantly said, ‘The right view respecting this Parashah is to suppose that by the phrase ‘my servant’ the whole of Israel is meant... As a different opinion, however, is adopted by the Midrash, which refers it to the Messiah... ‘And by his stripes we were healed’ – because the stripes by which he is vexed and distressed will heal us; God will pardon us for his righteousness, and we shall be healed both from our own transgressions and from the iniquities of our fathers.’⁸

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 as a poem falls into five stanzas. It’s also a chiasm, meaning that stanzas 1 and 5 match in theme: the King who reigns from the throne. Stanzas 2 and 4 match in theme: the rejection of the King and the events leading up to the death of the King. What is the very center of the poem? The third stanza, the explanation for the death of King, and why it’s so significant. Specifically, 53:5 is the great explanation. In verse 5, Isaiah places four images together, one after the other. I’ll teach from that one verse.

He Was Pierced for Our Transgressions: v.5a

The first line says, ‘But he was pierced through for our transgressions.’ Is this a prediction of crucifixion, perhaps before it was even invented?⁹ That would be significant. But before we go there, I think it’s important to ask how Isaiah would have understood the word ‘pierced.’¹⁰ To him, it would have meant ‘servanthood.’ Let’s consider the first mention of ‘piercing’ in the Hebrew Bible. In Jewish law, in Exodus 21, if a servant wanted to become permanently attached to a household, he or she could stand at the doorway, and the master would pierce the servant’s ear against the door post and put a ring in the servant’s ear. I presume there would be a little blood left on the door post. So this would have been a mini-Passover ceremony. The servant would then become a ‘bondservant,’ a voluntary, life-long servant of the house. The blood on the door post may have marked the bondservant’s way *into* that new household. If this is the right way to read this phrase, then it lends insight into the New Testament. Jesus was certainly pierced at the cross, leaving his blood to mark the way to follow him into the Father’s house. And Jesus is called a bondservant of God the Father (Phil.2:7). The New Testament writers thought it was a high honor to call themselves bondservants of Jesus (Paul in Rom.1:1, 2 Cor.4:5; Col.1:7, Phil.1:1; James in Jas.1:1; Peter in 2 Pet.1:1; Jude in Jude 1). Notice that in Isaiah, the Servant says that he allowed God ‘to open his ear’ (Isa.50:5), and we can be quite sure Jesus prayed that. Piercing is a commitment to being God’s servant.

Illus: That’s in contrast to human beings, who are not servants of God. We are transgressors. To transgress means ‘to cross a line; to violate some boundary.’ Because I didn’t know Jesus when I was younger, I destroyed things or vandalized things, because as a young man, I didn’t know how to deal with my anger. I ripped down street signs. I vandalized people’s houses and cars. In fact, my friends and I got into a high speed car chase with the father of this girl at school because we vandalized her house. I lit a whole couch out on the street on fire and the fire fighters had to come. Even though I don’t destroy things nowadays, I’m very tempted at times to destroy people verbally. I can rip people apart with my words. It’s very easy for me to forget God’s boundaries and limits. God articulates boundaries between people for our good and their good. He says, ‘That’s another person whom I cherish – you are not to treat them that way.’ But we’re all very capable of transgressing, crossing the line.

So what did Jesus do? Jesus made that visible. His physical body was pierced by people who obviously did not respect his physical boundaries. In most cases, your skin tells other people where you are physically and where they need to stop. His body was pierced, transgressed against. So what we do all the time, pierce through boundaries, Jesus drew to himself. He was pierced through because we pierced through. His body was transgressed because we transgressed against God. There’s a symmetry to that. But Jesus came to make God vulnerable, physical. What

⁷ Maimonides, ‘Letter to Yemen’, 12th century, quoted by S. R. Driver and A. Neubauer, editors, *The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters*, 2 volumes (New York: Ktav, 1969), p.322

⁸ Nachmanides, 13th century, quoted by S. R. Driver and A. Neubauer, editors, *The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters*, 2 volumes (New York: Ktav, 1969), p.78ff.

⁹ Persia may have developed crucifixion as early as the 6th century BC (Haman was hanged on a tree in the book of Esther). Alexander the Great brought crucifixion to Europe in the 300’s BC. The Roman Empire adopted it to execute political and military rebels.

¹⁰ Isaiah uses the word ‘pierced’ earlier in three places to designate an injury or death: those who are slain by the piercing of a sword (14:19); one whose hand is pierced by leaning on a deceptive staff (36:5); the mythical dragon Rahab pierced by God (51:9). In the context of Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12, it is certainly in connection with bodily injury leading to death. However, I believe that the earlier link between piercing and bondservice must be considered. A fuller treatment of this would also have to include Psalm 22:16.

people do to Jesus, we do implicitly to God. And it's as if Jesus said, 'You want to enter my body?' But he turned our sin into his invitation, 'Enter my body. Become attached to me. And enter my community, the body of my people. You want to enter my body? Then enter my body. You want to cross a line? Cross the line of my humanity and dwell here in me.'

Now we can interpret Jesus' crucifixion in light of his servanthood. It was not just his ear but *his entire body*. Here's some detail on crucifixion. Crucifixion was not the *most* painful way to die; that honor would probably belong to being cut into pieces and thrown into metal heated by fire, to be cooked in burning hot oil. But it probably came a close second. Crucifixion was the *most humiliating* way to die. You would be naked. You would be helpless. Jesus made his shame his glory. He showed that his body is for everyone. He exposed himself to everyone, to show his vulnerability and openness to you. Crucifixion was a warning to all people by the Romans: Don't even try giving your allegiance to someone other than Caesar. Jesus turned that around. He said, 'Do you see the totalitarian loyalty eventually demanded by the false gods (Col.2:15)? Those who want to claim you for their own will do this to the one true God.' His humiliation becomes his authority. When the cross was lifted from the ground, Jesus hung suspended between heaven and earth. In Jewish thought, that position of being hung on a tree meant that he was rejected by both heaven and earth. But Jesus turned that around. Jesus served God by mediating between heaven and earth, and connecting them in himself. In Jewish memory, what hung on a tree was cursed (Dt.21:22 – 23). Jesus was showing that the corruption in human nature itself was the curse that haunted humanity. And Jesus, as God's servant, was staining his blood on the wood, showing that he is the Passover doorway to the Father's house. Through Jesus is a new deliverance, by his new humanity.

He Was Crushed for Our Iniquities: v.5b

The second image deepens the first. 'He was crushed for our iniquities.' 'Iniquity' is a parallel word to 'transgression,' but in most cases seems to include the motive: intentional rebellion against God. And because Isaiah is now talking about our internal condition, not just our external actions, he also talks about the internal condition of Jesus. This is what Jesus felt for you and me. Have you ever ached for someone? I had a friend who cut herself, and at times, my heart ached for her. My dad was an alcoholic, and in my better moments, when I wasn't just angry, I would say my heart ached for him. My heart felt crushed. Scripture uses the word 'crushed' in that way. The spirit can be crushed, as Psalm 34:18 refers to those 'who are crushed in spirit.' You would crush your enemy if you left them with no hope.¹¹ So what was it Jesus experienced emotionally?

Illus: This was the part of Jesus' life that drew me. When I was 16, my parents started arguing explicitly about divorce. Now I had good friends who either had gone through similar things or were going through similar things at the time. Yet it didn't really help me. I felt like no one understood me. I felt like I was walking through a fog. Maybe some of you feel that right now. You feel alone, even if you're surrounded by tons of people. For reasons I didn't understand back then, I began to get interested in Jesus. I started reading the Bible. I had investigated Buddhism when I was younger. There was a statue of the Buddha in my grandmother's house, and I thought as I looked at it, 'Buddha has his arms folded and eyes closed symbolized his not really being engaged in the pain of this world. Now I understand that it reflects contentment, but it's a contentment based on not being affected by this world. In fact, many statues depict him as being fat, so he seems even further disengaged from issues of hunger and poverty.' But I found that Jesus is different. There's one story of Jesus standing by the tomb of his friend Lazarus, in John 11, and weeping. Since I had some Buddhist background, that story really stood out to me. Jesus was affected emotionally. He wasn't distant. He was never distant. Jesus symbolizes and embodies God's full engagement with human pain. I thought: If he was really God, then the One who soared above the heavens became an infant, contained in a womb, completely dependent on his mama for everything. All of us were completely helpless like that, and Jesus joined us in that experience. I noticed that his family was poor, so poor that they couldn't pay the standard baby dedication price at the Temple. Some of us come from families that have really struggled. His people survived multiple attempts at genocide, sometimes barely. My dad's side of the family had been through the internment of Japanese-Americans, but that was nowhere near what Jewish families had gone through. Jesus shared in our pimples, puberty, and public teasing, like all of us. When Jesus was a kid, he was probably clumsy and awkward, like us at one point. According to tradition, Joseph died when Jesus was still young, so Jesus probably had a shortened childhood. He had to take on more responsibility; I'm an oldest child, so I could connect with that. Some of us had the experience of losing an earthly parent. And that's just Jesus' early life. Look

¹¹ Jeremiah used the word 'crushed' in Lamentations 3:34 to speak of Israel being trampled by an enemy. But I would argue even in Jeremiah's usage, the word 'crushed' is describing emotions. Interestingly enough, 'crushed' is *never* used to describe a victim of stoning. So Isaiah envisioned the Suffering Servant being killed, but not in the standard Jewish way.

at what he endured later: conflict, mocking, death threats, betrayal, public shaming, and crucifixion. Why? So at the end of my tenth grade year, I wrote a poem. It was about Jesus' suffering. I would not have called myself a Christian at all. But I was beginning to see that if Jesus were real, if he was who he said he was, then he would understand me. He would *know me*. I didn't understand him at that time, but that drew me towards him. And I remember thinking, 'If there is a God, I hope He's like this.'

As someone who comes from a Buddhist background, and as someone who is tempted to just be Stoic, I experience this God as amazing. I'm still amazed that this God has a passionate, pursuing love, and suffering doesn't stop him. God wrapped His heart in human flesh in Jesus and showed you how He feels about you. The God who would unite Himself with you – this God united Himself to your human nature so that in Jesus and by his Spirit, you can partake of *his divine nature*.

Disciplined for Our Peace, Wounded for Our Healing: v.5c – 5d

In the next two lines, Isaiah says that Jesus doesn't just legally forgive us but medically heals us. And we need his healing. I'm going to take the next two lines together. 'The chastening for our peace [shalom, wholeness, well-being] fell upon him. By his wounding we are healed.'

Illus: Now the best way I have of explaining this is to give you a metaphor. A few years ago, I gave a gift to my wife's brother: one of my kidneys. Paul, my brother-in-law, was at a crossroads. Healthy kidneys normally filter out toxins from your bloodstream. Those toxins make your urine yellow. They need to leave your body. But Paul's kidneys weren't filtering those toxins out. So his skin had an unhealthy yellow tinge to it. Being Chinese, he looked especially weird. The lactic acid that your muscles give off when you're sore after a workout was not leaving his body, so he felt tired and sore. Potassium, which we need in small quantities, was building up in his bloodstream, and unfortunately potassium is what is injected into death sentence prisoners in large quantities to send their hearts into cardiac arrest. Paul was in danger of heart failure at age 33. Although dialysis was an option, it wasn't a good one in his case. His dad wasn't eligible because he had had heart surgery before. My wife Ming was an option but she had already delivered each of our two children by C-section, and I felt like that was enough for her. I was the best option. I was 34, so relatively young. And male kidneys are bigger and could filter more blood. So we went to the hospital. I had never had surgery before, so I was nervous. The surgeon had told me what would happen. I would become unconscious. They would turn me on my side. He would make an incision right above my belly button, through my abdominal muscles, or what little I have left after my swimming days. They would put two catheters into my side which had small scissors at the ends. When the surgeon put his hand into my gut, the catheters would snip my left kidney loose, and it would roll right into the surgeon's hand. Then they would stitch me up and put the kidney in Paul's right side, under his own kidney. So, as they sedated me, I thought about all that, and I wondered, 'Am I going to die?!?' I prayed, 'Lord...' and then passed out. Meanwhile they did all that. As soon as the surgeon put the kidney into Paul, it began to filter out the poisons. He peed yellow, as he should. Within 48 hours, his creatinine levels dropped from 13 to 2, and 1.6 is normal. So when I got up and saw Paul, he looked great. His skin color was already looking normal. They didn't cut through much muscle for him, so there wasn't that much incisional pain. It was like getting a new oil filter in your car. He was feeling better than he had felt in many months. But I felt awful. I said, 'Stop the morphine. Give me that vicodin!'

I think that's a good parallel because all of us have a poison in our bodies, a disease of self-centeredness. We need healing from it. The reason why God extended Himself in the person of the Son to become a human being named Jesus of Nazareth was to ACQUIRE our disease. Second, it was to have a human body in which to DEVELOP THE ANTIDOTE to the disease. It was in the physical body of Jesus. JESUS CLEANSED THAT HUMANITY OF HUMAN SELF-CENTEREDNESS through his moment by moment choice to never sin. But then God raised Jesus as a fresh, new humanity – a God-drenched humanity – perfectly fused with the love of God. And God made Jesus into a spiritual organ donor. Now, by inviting us to Jesus, God can now give us a gift: a new, cleansed spirit; a new, cleansed heart, the Spirit of a fresh new humanity that is just like Jesus because it actually comes from him.

In fact, leading up to this, God Himself was like a dialysis machine among the Israelites. Isaiah understood it as the Temple sacrifices and especially the Day of Atonement. A dialysis machine takes impure blood and filters out the toxins and then returns the purified blood into your body. That is what God did through the Temple, symbolically. He took the impurities of the Israelites, symbolically. He gave back His purity, again symbolically, through the blood of animals. Why? Because human blood was corrupted, but animal blood was not because animals had never fallen into sin. So when the priests received the blood of the animals from God, they *sprinkled* it on objects and sometimes people to purify them. That is why Isaiah says, 'He will *sprinkle* many nations' (52:15). He will give his

life and purity and cleansing power to the world. It's what is in Jesus that gives us life, because in himself, Jesus has united human nature to God. He did what we cannot do. He healed our disease.

So when Isaiah speaks of 'his wounding,' that certainly fits the police brutality that Jesus took. But the wounding is not just *upon* his body, but *within* his body. It's not just *at* his death but *from his birth*. Jesus took on the wound underneath all our wounds, the disease behind all our diseases. And when Isaiah speaks of a 'chastisement,' or disciplining,¹² it's not just that Jesus was provoked by other people and taunted. The disciplining goes even further and deeper than that. It's because Jesus fought and disciplined and chastised something in himself the whole way through, from birth to death. That is how much God hates our sin.

How was that for him? We barely understand it. How many of you struggle with wanting to murder other people? I didn't think so. But how many of you harbor grudges, or give up on people, or gossip about other people, or build coalitions against people you don't like, or assassinate their character? You see, sin is actually easier to resist in its later stages, because there are laws against it, you'll probably go to jail, and you may lose friends. But before the seed of sin blooms into a nasty flower and becomes an external action, it's there internally, and there, it is very hard to resist. Things stay hidden inside us, and that's where sin incubates and festers. There's a principle there. The earlier you try to deal with your own sin and self-centeredness, the harder it is. Those of you who have tried know that. But Jesus dealt with it at the root, where it was most difficult. Every time his mind wanted to think private thoughts apart from God, he said, 'No.' He constantly turned his mind and his emotions back to God and back into the love of God. He dealt with sin at its source.

Illus: It's hard to include someone at the very center of who you are. When my wife Ming and I got married, I would say yes to hang out with my friends without consulting her. And Ming would make decisions about money without consulting me. And both of us had to include the other person's concerns at the center of who we are.

That is the discipline, the chastisement, Jesus pounded into his humanity. In his own body, he bent our human nature back to be fully united with the Father in the Spirit. That's how Jesus gives us back our shalom, our wholeness and well-being and peace, our healing and restoration. I just said that God wrapped his heart in human flesh and showed you how he feels about you, which is love. Yes, but He also did it to show you how He feels about the sin in your body, which is wrath: 'That cancer must go.' I will replace it with the Father's presence.

Illus: I've seen the miracle of this in my younger sister. My sister is four years younger than me. So when I was in 10th grade, I was able to drive and I had a car; I would basically run away from the problems at home. I would go to my friends' houses and play video games, or something. But my sister would have to stay at home and deal with the mess I didn't want to be around. She gave her life to Jesus sometime during 9th and 10th grade. In high school, she was more of a Christian moralist. In a college application essay that she let me read, she described how our mom and dad didn't live up to God's definition of marriage. I thought that that was true, but something was lacking. For God is not just a moralist, but a pursuing lover and reconciler. But I could understand, because when she was in high school and I was in college, my dad physically hit my mom, and my sister was so afraid that she kept a large kitchen knife in her bedside dresser. But over time, something changed. She didn't just side with our mom against our dad, which was easy to do. Instead, she reached out to our dad, and for a while, she was the one to call me and remind me to call dad on his birthday. Jesus was in her, filtering out the toxins, and bending her heart back around the heart of the Father. That is what Jesus does. It's what he already did in himself. So when you think about your own sin and self-centeredness, and you wonder how strongly God hates that thing in you, think on this. God hates it so much He came personally to pour His wrath out upon it. He killed it in Jesus. He wants to kill it in you.

Conclusion

Let me conclude this reflection. Is Isaiah 53 a prophecy of Jesus? Obviously, I think it is. Let me say two things about that. First, faith in Jesus satisfies my *mind*. Second, Jesus satisfies my *heart*. How does Jesus satisfy my mind? It starts with the story Jesus is part of. Step one: The biblical story is a happy ending story. That by itself needs explanation. How did the Jews develop that story? It is a sociological anomaly, or a *miracle*, that has no other explanation. Step two is this: If we live in a happy ending story, then the God who is 100% good must have a way of providing reason for us to believe that He exists and that He will defeat evil one day. If you've ever been asked to serve on a jury, you know that our whole system of justice is in the domain of history: documents, physical evidence, testimony of witnesses, trustworthiness of those witnesses, counterevidence, storyline, motive, psychology

¹² The word 'chastisement' means 'a disciplining,' like how parents discipline their children, e.g. Ps.94:12 – 'Blessed are those you chasten.'

and sociology, understanding how people usually behave, and so on. That is all in the realm of history. Most of the things you say you know come from historical evidence anyway. Step three: Christian faith is fundamentally not a philosophy like Hinduism or Buddhism; nor is it just a personal mystical experience; it is a claim to *factual history* and *an interpretation of history*, and therefore it offers a way for you to evaluate it from the outside. Some faiths will say that you can only evaluate their faith from within – you have to step into it in order to know the truth of it. Christian faith is not that way. So if you're searching for the truth, you might as well start with Jesus because he presents himself to you! Most other belief systems do not present historical evidence to you. Step four: How do you explain the book of Isaiah and the entire biblical story? Let's start with the hard facts: copies of Isaiah dating back 125 – 335 years before Jesus describe the assassination of a future Jewish King, the greatest King, in incredible detail. What do you make of that? Step five: Consider the character of this God. The only way God can be 100% good is if He is not passive, because to be passive in the face of human evil is to be evil. And He must attack evil at its root source, in each one of us, which He does by taking human nature to Himself in Jesus, healing it, and giving us a new humanity. So this God who is 100% good loves us to perfection. Does it all fit together? I think it does.

Second: faith in Jesus satisfies my *heart*. The older I get, the more I admire Jesus, respect him, adore him, am inspired by him, and worship him. What other 'god' enters into our experience and wraps his heart in human flesh to embrace us? There are many other gods who supposedly sit in the heavens without ever coming down, without ever touching us. They might claim to judge us, but what gives them the right? If you're not doing anything about human evil, doesn't that make you evil? Therefore a passive god cannot actually be a judge of human evil. Only an active God like this one, who heals human nature by judging it in himself, can be the one who judges it in everyone else. This God is the only God who is lovable. And He is lovable because He loves you and me and every single person, and is always wooing us, calling us, inviting, and yes, *commanding* us, into His very best for us.