

“The Suffering Servant” Isaiah 53

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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Jeff: Our gracious Father, we give You thanks for the opportunity to come before You. And we know that we’ve gathered here because You have put a love in our hearts for Yourself, the triune God. And Lord, we’re thankful for that, and we pray that You would continue to nurture it. We pray, Father, that as You have given us Your word, a means of grace, that You would indeed do just that, that You would cause us to grow in our love for You, in our knowledge of You. Our Father, we pray that You would help us as we seek to edify not only ourselves in the study of Your word, but to be a blessing to others through what we’ve studied, for how we conduct ourselves and how we talk. We pray, Father, that Your glory would extend.

Father, as we gather together we are thankful to do so. And we pray for those for whom we care. And we think about Zach Hubbard, and though many of us don’t know him, he was a faithful attender of this study. Some do, and we pray for Your hand to be upon him. We pray for the surgery to go well. And we pray, though it be an invasive surgery, we ask that You would grant him speedy healing and recovery. Father, we pray that You would grant him recovery and healing for whatever it is that is the cause of the need for the surgery.

Father, we’re thankful that You love us so and that You demonstrate that love by giving us men like Bruce Bickel and the bishop as they are able to teach and encourage by the very character of their lives, not simply by their mouths. And Lord, we ask that You will bless both of them. We think especially of the bishop as he’s had this recent surgery, and we ask that You’d grant him healing. We look forward to seeing him next week at the breakfast table, and ask that You will bless him and the men who gather. Father, we give You thanks for his life and for the way in which You’ve used him in so many ways. And Lord, we just ask that in these latter years that You would give him a sense of closeness to You, a sense of comfort and a sense of joy at the prospect of seeing You. And Lord, we ask that for him through Christ our Lord.

Now Father, as we gather to study Your word, we ask that You will be with us and that You’ll strengthen us and encourage our hearts in the Word that You’ve inspired. We ask it in Jesus’ precious name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. So let’s turn to Isaiah 53 today—Isaiah 53. And you’ll notice that we skipped Isaiah 49, and I’ve done that intentionally. We’ll come back to Isaiah 49. But we’re going to go to Isaiah 53 today. And I want us to look at the whole chapter. But I’m going to start our time together thinking about Isaiah 52:13. Let me read the word of the Lord to you.

“Behold, My Servant shall act wisely.

He shall be high and lifted up,

And shall be exalted.

As many were astonished at You,

His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,

And His form beyond that of the children of mankind.

So shall He sprinkle many nations;

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*Kings shall shut their mouths because of Him,
For that which has not been told them they see,
And that which they have not heard they understand.
Who has believed what he has heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
For He grew up before Him like a young plant,
And like a root out of dry ground.
He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him,
And no beauty that we should desire Him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
As One from whom men hide their faces,
He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.
Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God and afflicted.
But He was pierced for our transgressions;
He was crushed for our iniquities.
Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
And with His wounds 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.
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
Like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
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,
Stricken for the transgression of My people?
And they made His grave with the wicked,
And with a rich man in His death—
Although He had done no violence,
And there was no deceit in His mouth.
Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him;
He has put Him to grief.
When His soul makes an offering for guilt,
He shall see His offspring;
He shall prolong His days.
The will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.
Out of the anguish of His soul
He shall see and be satisfied.*

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*By His knowledge shall the Righteous One, My Servant,
Make many to be accounted righteous,
And He shall bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the many,
And He will divide the spoil with the strong,
Because He poured out His soul to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors.
Yet He bore the sin of many,
And makes intercession for the transgressors.”*

I want us to think about this particular passage today. And I want us to do that by thinking about an introduction—just a couple of words by way of introduction. I want us to think about an enigmatic victory here. I want us to think about the humiliation of the Servant. And then I want us to see how it is that the prophet explains the suffering. Those are basically the headings that I want us to think about.

But I want to start with a very practical question. Would you ever start a gospel presentation or an evangelistic presentation with the Old Testament? Do you ever do that? And if you would, where might you begin? Where would you begin to unfold the gospel in the Old Testament?

In some ways we think about that in terms of what we read in the New Testament. For instance we read in 2 Timothy 3:16 that the Scriptures are inspired and useful. And when we think about that text we often think about the New Testament.

But I want you to consider something. I want you to consider the fact that when you think about that text, to think about the New Testament is not the direction you want to go. You ought to think about the Old Testament because the New Testament had not yet been completed. The Canon had not been finished at that point.

The interesting thing is when you go to Luke 24. When you go to Luke 24 the two disciples are on the road to Emmaus together and they encounter Jesus. And He says to them, “You foolish and slow of heart! Are you not thinking about all that the Scriptures have said and taught about Me?” There He is not thinking about the New Testament; He’s certainly thinking about the Old Testament. So where would you begin if you had the opportunity to present the gospel from the Old Testament? In other words, we could start from the Old Testament.

But the question is, what if somebody handed you a zinger? What if somebody handed you a text that said, “Now I want you to begin here. I’m not giving you a choice as to where you might begin.” What would you then say?

Well, when you think about the New Testament and you think about the book of Acts, that’s exactly what happens to Philip. How would you like to be this guy? You go down to Gaza and you’re going to go to a desert. And there you’re going to encounter a eunuch, a strange man as it is. And he’s going to be reading in his cart a scroll, a scroll that he has probably taken from the library of Candace. I’m not sure he had the permission to do that. And he’s reading along the way and you’re going to encounter him. And he’s going to ask you, “What’s this about?” And you’re going to have to tell him what it’s about.

I think that’s an absolutely fascinating story, and that’s exactly what you find in Acts chapter 8. Philip goes down to Gaza and he encounters this Ethiopian eunuch. He has to explain to the eunuch what it is that he’s talking about. Now I want you to think about that for just a minute. Philip asks him, “*Do you understand what you are reading?*”

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And the Ethiopian eunuch says, “*How can I, unless there is someone to explain it to me?*”, “unless there is someone to guide me through what’s here?”

And so Philip says, “So what are you reading?”, and he tells him. And it’s Isaiah 53.

And remember the question he has. The question he has is, is the author talking about himself or someone else? And it’s from that point that Philip begins to explain Jesus Christ to him. He talks to him about Christ in the text.

And you might say to yourself, “Well, this is a fairly easy one. Isaiah is a fairly easy text to get to Jesus.”

You’ve heard me tell you the story about Rich Gantz before. He is a Jewish man who hears someone read to him from the text of Isaiah 53. And he jumps back and he says, “How dare you read the New Testament to me, a Jew!” So it’s a fascinating thing when you think about it.

But what might you say to the Ethiopian eunuch? How might you explain what’s here in the text? And that’s what I want us to think about as we look through Isaiah 53. What might we say to somebody about Jesus from Isaiah 53?, because that’s of course what the text demands. So let’s think about that, and let’s think about the enigmatic victory that’s in the text.

It’s a mystery; it’s kind of perplexing when you think about it. First of all you find it in Isaiah 52 starting with those last passages in the chapter. You find that this is a little bit of a strange account, isn’t it? What do we have here? Whoever this is, His appearance is “*marred beyond human semblance.*” That’s a striking thing. And yet, when you think about it, He’s the victor.

How do we know that? We know that because verse 13 says that “*He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.*”

So here it is. We have this Man or this Person that is marred beyond human semblance, and yet He’s the victor. We have Isaiah 53:12 saying, “*I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong.*” This Person is clearly victorious.

Now how do we understand that? Well, in a simple way I have a tendency to think that this is the boxer’s glory. In His victory you see His humiliation, right? If you’ve watched any kind of boxing on TV you know that they interview the guy who won. And he’s beaten to ribbons; you know what I mean? You know, his mouth is swollen up and he’s bleeding out of his eye. And he’s usually thanking God for the victory. (*Laughter*) I always thought that was funny, you know? “Thank you, Lord, for the ability to pommel that guy over there.” (*Laughter*)

But in one sense his victory, whether it’s a boxer or a soldier or whatever, his victory is in his humiliation. He would not be victorious unless he passed through his humiliation. And that’s what we see here in the text. We see that the Suffering Servant is a victorious Servant only because He passes through this humiliating process of achieving our victory, or His victory on our behalf.

But it raises the question. The question is why is He so marred? And again it’s the very introduction. It’s the few verses that you get before you actually get into Isaiah 53 that give a hint as to why it is that He might have this victory. It’s in verse 15. “So He shall sprinkle the nations.” And so His victory has something to do with what He’s going to be able to do for the nations. And yet it’s given to us in this really mysterious way.

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So all of this sort of helps us to understand that there is this Person—that He’s beaten, that He’s bloody, beyond human semblance. Yet He’s victorious. His victory is through His humiliation. And that victory is not just for Himself. That victory is going to extend to the other nations; it has something to do with the nations.

And so when you unpack it like that you need to realize that something more is here than would meet the eye. So it’s fascinating when you think about it. But what we need to do is that we need to get into the humiliation a bit more in order to understand it. But I want to ask you if there are any thoughts or any questions that you want to talk about at this point. Yeah; go ahead, Sig.

Sig Tragard: Ted wants to say something, I’m sure.

Jeff: Sure.

Ted Wood: I thought what you just said was very interesting, because for folks to understand the role of the Servant, it’s not obscure, but it’s kind of enigmatic.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: I agree. And it’s versus you’re a sinner. Jesus died for your sin. Believe in Him and you’ll go to heaven. I mean, that’s not enigmatic. But that’s not how the message is conveyed.

Jeff: No.

Ted: The question is why is it enigmatic? That’s the thing that I’m kind of turning around in my brain right now.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: I mean, Isaiah couldn’t make it much more clear. I mean, there is all kinds of stuff in this. You could say, wait a second. Is he talking in this verse about the Servant, about God, about the observer of the Servant? I mean, this is a tough passage. It’s clear, but it’s perplexing in part.

Jeff: Yeah. It’s clear to us because we stand on this side of the cross, right?

Ted: That’s right.

Jeff: Go ahead.

Ted: Jim, my associate.

Jim Hamilton: It’s hard to understand how Israelis wouldn’t see this as Christ, read this and believe it. Living in today’s world and seeing that Christians are believing, it’s hard to understand why they can’t believe.

Jeff: Well you know, a couple of things are interesting. Some of them actually see the suffering Servant as symbolic of the nation itself. But then there are others that because of its Christian connections—and some of you guys have told me—there are synagogues that don’t even read this text.

Ted: You can go on YouTube and have orthodox rabbis explain this without Jesus. They will tell you that this is not about Jesus.

Jeff: That’s right.

Ted: This is about something else. And you could sit there and listen to a 15-minute lecture on why it’s not. So it’s not like it’s so obvious that they don’t believe and they’re stupid.

Jeff: Yes; that’s true. The trouble though is that Judaism has gone through its stages just like Protestantism, Catholicism or anything else, right?

Ted: Not the Catholic Church.

Jeff: What’s that?

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Sig: Ted said, “Not the Catholic Church.”

Jeff: Oh, come on now! (*Laughter*) The Catholics have just done a good job of pretending to be monolithic. (*Laughter*) But one of the things that you have when you think about Judaism is that you have it going through all these stages. You think about Judaism almost as a monolithic body, although it’s not. You think about this body that has gone through stages because of its rejection of its own Messiah. And so there are certain Jews that come away saying that God is just an idea, that the Messiah is a state. And there are just ways of accessing Judaism that put a different spin on all of these things, whether it be God or whether it be the Messiah or whether it be the end, and what have you. It’s sad to watch them really go through the throes of grief and rejection because of their rejection.

I think that one of the things we might also say is that when we think from the Old Testament on into the New Testament, remember what 1 Peter says in chapter 1, verses 10-12.

Transcriber’s Note: 1 Peter 1:10-12, ESV. *“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what Person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.”*

Jeff: He says that the Spirit of Christ was prophesying about Christ in the prophets. But they didn’t know what Person or time would be His arrival. And so when you think about the Spirit of Christ prophesying through Isaiah about Christ, yet Isaiah is seeing through a glass dimly at this time. He doesn’t understand about whom he is speaking; it’s tough to see. He doesn’t know when this Person will manifest Himself, or how God will manifest Him to us. There is all kinds of mystery and ambiguity.

But there are things that he does understand. And that is that he understands, for instance, a very basic thing. If you go all the way back to Genesis 3:15 there is a promised Messiah.

Transcriber’s Note: Genesis 3:15, ESV.
*“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and her Offspring.
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.”*

Jeff: And we know that because in Genesis chapter 5 Lamech names his son Noah in anticipation of a Messiah, thinking to himself that this may be the Messiah who will deliver us from the curse. So there’s clearly an anticipation about the one who will come and be a Substitute; freedom from the curse. And so they’re anticipating that. So whoever this is in Isaiah 53, at least from Isaiah’s perspective, this is the Messiah who was promised, even though He is a shadowy figure and we don’t know much about Him.

However, when you think about it, when you think about Peter for instance, think for a minute about the Gospels. Think for a minute about Mark chapters 8 through the end of chapter 10. One of the things that you get there is the question: who is Jesus? Actually the question has shifted. In the first eight chapters it’s really about the question: who is Jesus?

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And when you get to 8-10 the question kind of shifts not only to who is He?, but what did He come to do?

And you can see the difference. Why? Because in the first eight chapters remember that it's demons who recognize Jesus, and it's humans that don't recognize Him. And so you have parallels. Demons recognize Him; humans don't. And then there's a culmination of that section. Peter recognizes Him. *“You are the Christ.”* And that's in chapter 8.

Well then, at the end of chapter 8 right through the end of chapter 10 the question shifts. And the question that shifts is this. Who are You and what have You come to do? What is this about Your work? You said that You are here to die and rise again. And three times in 8, 9 and 10 Jesus says, “I'm going to be handed over and crucified. But I will rise again.” Three times He says that in that section.

And the questions shift. He goes up on the Mount of Transfiguration. Remember what happens. What happens is that they are on the way back down the mountain. And the disciples are not asking who He is. They're saying, “What's this talk about rising from the dead?” They're asking that to one another, and they're talking about it. And they witness the Resurrection glory.

At the bottom of the mountain do you remember what happens? The boy throws himself into the fire. And then he kind of sprawls out as if he's dead. And Jesus says, “Rise!”, right? And so we see a resurrection pictured at the bottom of the mountain. So the whole thing is about resurrection.

Here's the interesting thing. In that section there is also a lot about “the first will be last and the last will be first.” And remember, it's in that section that the disciples are arguing who is greatest in the Kingdom. But it's also in that section, you remember, when we find Peter at the top of the mountain at the Transfiguration, saying, “Lord, let's just hang out here. Let's forget all that humiliation stuff. Let's be first and not be last. Let's not have You go through the humiliation of death and rising again, whatever that means.”

And so what you get is, you get this idea that by the time Judaism develops there is an eschewing of humiliation. There is a distancing oneself from whatever Isaiah 53 means. We don't want any part of it, but we want glory. And it's epitomized in Peter.

And that's often epitomized in us, isn't it? I mean, when you really think about it, the best part of us glories in a text like this one. But I think that in our regular moments we say, “That's great for Jesus, but I don't want to have any part of that.”

And yet do you remember what Peter says in his first letter? He says, *“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.”* In other words, humiliation is yours now. God will exalt you at the proper time. The exaltation is for God to do, not for you to do. Humiliation is for you now.

Boy, that's a tough pill to swallow, because when we look at this we're not only seeing what Jesus did for me, but we're seeing a life that He patterns out for us—not so that we can earn anything before Him, but so that we can be shaped according to His likeness and in His image, right? That's the idea.

So in some ways that's where the rubber meets the road. It may never be that we're beaten beyond human semblance. However, there is the humiliation of Christ that we will all walk in. If you want to see that played out just see it in Peter. I mean, it's anything from Peter saying to exiles, “Hey guys! I know you're in exile, and it's time to stop the life that you were living. Just because you're far away in a distant land doesn't mean that

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you can take up your old habits and your old sins. In fact, now is when you should be living faithfully. So put that stuff away. Christ died once for us that we might live unto Him,” that kind of thing. That’s the kind of humiliated life that he’s talking about, day-to-day stuff, in our case just regular day-to-day living. Anything that you want to talk about?

Ted: What you just said is extremely profound, this humiliation.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: It’s a point where we all struggle.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right.

Ted: If we preach the truth it would seem like we should be preaching the humiliation because this is what it’s going to be like to be a Christian.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: Not staying on the Mount of Transfiguration. And I think the Jews have been humiliated; you can just look at their history.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: One humiliation after the other. If it wasn’t that they were bringing it upon themselves it was the Assyrians, the Babylonians, Alexander, the Romans; you can go right down the list. “We’ve had enough humiliation, Lord. We’ve been beaten down and out; we don’t want any more of this.” And that’s exactly what we say. We’re through with COVID; I’ve had enough of COVID. I’m weary of it; I’m done with it.

Jeff: Go ahead.

Jim: Again, it would seem to me that you can understand how Jews would not accept Christ as their Messiah at the time of His death. That’s one thing. *Unclear*) But today I don’t know how they can reject the fact that He is the Messiah; it just doesn’t make sense to me.

Jeff: Well you have to remember the question that’s asked. “*To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*” And so there’s an aspect to that their hard hearts and their rejection is because the blinders are on, and God has not chosen to remove them. So there’s a sovereignty of God issue in that whole thing.. So you and I both look at the Jew and go, how can you not? And yet ultimately the answer is because God has not allowed them to see Him for who He is, to see this One for who He is.

Jim: But how can they not believe Isaiah when they read it?

Ted: Because God has not given them the eyes to see.

Jeff: Yeah. They have to be given the eyes to see who Jesus is, and they just haven’t been. I know; it’s a baffling thing. Somebody else had his hand up. Oh, Matt! You know, I forgot to pray for Pine Valley. We’re going to stop right now and pray for Pine Valley. Let us pray.

Ted: Praise God.

Jeff: Father in heaven, we give you thanks for Matt and for his tireless service to the Kingdom. We give You thanks for the Pine Valley camp. We ask that Your hand would be upon that work. O Lord, we’re not only thankful that Matt works with the young people that are brought there who often are without Christ and who need to be introduced to Him, but also for the tireless work that he puts into the counselors who came and seek to work with these kids, and how he mentors them to be better mentors themselves. So Father, we’re thankful for Matt and for the Pine Valley work. We ask that Your hand would bless it and be upon it especially for this summer. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

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Matt Reichart: Thanks for praying; I needed that. So in the context of the Scripture, you have His humiliation. And that’s a good passage to remind ourselves. But I’m in the midst of it now, being a part of the ministry in regard to the family of God, where there have been things said about me that aren’t true.

Jeff: I didn’t hear you.

Matt: When there are things said about you that aren’t true. What do you say before God? And how do you actually defend yourself? Do you just be quiet?

Jeff: You know, I can give you a piece of advice that my minister gave me years ago.

Matt: Okay.

Jeff: I don’t know; this is a funny thing. I talked to this minister of mine on the phone. It had been 25 years since I talked to him, and I just talked to him about a month ago. It was such a wonderful conversation. But he reminded me. He said, “You know, Jeff, you were such an inquisitive person back then. You asked me all kinds of things—things where I used to go away wondering, why did you ask me that?” (*Laughter*) But one time I asked him, “How do you live through scandal? How do you live through rumor and scandal? How do you do that?”

And he gave me a piece of advice that I’ve never forgotten and that I think is valuable. He simply said, “Jeff, you work faithfully and consistently through it all; you just serve.”

And here’s how I interpret it. You just take the plane up to 30,000 feet above the clouds. And you enjoy the sunshine while the storm is raging beneath you, and then you just fly. And I like that. And that’s kind of what I did. I don’t care what’s going on below. I have a destination that I’m getting to.

Matt: And when it’s from the outside with people you don’t have a deep relationship with,--

Jeff: You don’t have a deep relationship?

Matt: We do.

Jeff: You do.

Matt: Yes, and that’s the quandary.

Jeff: The trouble though is that as soon as you start defending yourself then it’s a never-ending cycle. I think that if you just keep on in faithfulness you’re modeling the Savior in that regard.

Matt: Yes.

Jeff: You know, I was in a situation once where I was attacked heavily. And in fact the person was actually trying to get me out of the church—not only from that particular local church, but he was trying to remove me from the ministry.

Sig: Wow!

Jeff: And my session said two things to me. They said, “We can’t save your ministry; only God can save your ministry.” And the second thing they said was this. They said to me, “Keep quiet.”

And it was interesting. Only once did I ever have anyone come to me and ask me a question about what was happening. And my response to them was that I’ll talk about it if you’ll be in front of my session, so that they can have a leash on me so I don’t say too much.

And this person said to me, “That’s okay. You know what? Forget about it.” He said, “I have questions. But I trust the session and I trust you, and I’m just going to let it go.” And that was the only time in the midst of that time when I had anyone come and ask me.

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So here is how I view that now. You pay into your account money, right? You put credibility into your account by your faithful living. And then sometimes you don't have any more to put in there because you draw down on what it is that you've put into the account already. And I look at that as drawing down on my credibility that we had as a session and that I had as a pastor, and was able to weather that storm and get through it, and actually come out on the other side of it.

I'll tell you this just to wind up the story. Eight years later the guy came around and repented publicly and had a repentance better than I could have written for him. I mean, he remembered things that I didn't remember. But again, that's eight years of damage that occurred, and there was some damage; I took some hits. But do you know what? Looking back on it I wouldn't have changed it. But for whatever that's worth, yes?

David Miller: Correlating on to that, the way the Jews handled the Scripture, between the Old and the New Testament there were hundreds of years of rabbinical teaching. But they added weasel words to justify themselves so they wouldn't subject themselves to the word of God. And Jesus actually told the Pharisees, “You have nullified the word of God by your traditions.” Not only was this happening among the Jews.

Jeff: Yeah.

David: On a mission trip I was approached by a Russian Orthodox priest. And he said that we could not understand the Bible without the Russian Orthodox Church. So it was useless for us to go there on a mission trip. Of course, we saw about 600 people beside us come to Christ on the trip.

Jeff: Yeah.

David: We also see it in Catholicism. Now they are writing some changes in their stances and all that. We see the same tendency for weasel words. We see it in liberal Protestantism. It is an effort to keep us from subjecting ourselves, our hearts and our ears to hear the word of God. As it says in Revelation, “He that has an ear, let him hear.”

Jeff: Yes, and that's true. And you know, I have not done a study about how this actually grew up. But when you think about the Babylonian captivity, that's typically what you think of when you think about the oral tradition that grew up. There's the oral tradition that grew up, and then there's the written oral tradition. And that's what you're talking about. Basically that can come between the people of God and the word of God, such that by the time you get into the 400 years between Malachi and Matthew, it's in that 400 years that you can begin to see a shift in Judaism. Up until that time there had been prophets always calling people back to the faithfulness of God and His word. But it's in that 400-year period between the Testaments that you begin to see a shift happening, and extra-Biblical writings where there is a teaching that this is by our doing. In other words, we're saved by what we do—our own righteousness. And you see a real proliferation of that teaching kind of explode at that time. And that's what pushes you into the New Testament with that sort of full-blown tradition, but also another way of salvation other than what the Scriptures teach.

And that's why Paul says what he says in Romans; I think it's at the end of Romans 9. Why is it that the Gentiles received this and the Jews didn't? It's because the Jews pursued it as if it were by works, and the Gentiles pursued it as if it were by faith. And they are the children of Israel because their father is Abraham who is the believer, the man of faith. So you're right.

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And it is interesting to think about how always, any time Satan wants to distance us from the word of God, he develops tradition that keeps us away from it. You know what I mean. We all have tradition. I mean, the Westminster Confession is a tradition that our church embraces. But hopefully that tradition is subservient to and pushes you into the Scriptures.

It’s like you say. It’s in Roman Catholicism, where you actually have a stream of tradition and revelation—the Bible. And the two are supposedly of equal authority, and yet they conflict with one another. Go ahead.

David: Whenever our traditions and our opinions conflict with the word of God, if our opinions and our traditions are put up on an equal level, then what we end up doing is that we judge the word of God by our opinions.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. We have an “Ask the Pastor” in our church for the youth group once a month? I don’t know how often it is. But anyway, we have an “Ask the Pastor” night. And I just had a youth say to me, “You know, Pastor Jeff, I have Roman Catholic friends who don’t believe the way you often talk about them believing. They believe that it’s by faith alone. How can you say that?”

And I’ll say this, and here’s what I said. It’s because they’re reading their Bibles. They’re reading the Bible and seeing that it’s faith alone. But the problem is that when you have an infallible tradition that can’t be changed, now all of a sudden—and this is what you tell them. “If you believe in faith alone,” then you tell them, “There’s a name for you, and it’s called Protestant.” *(Laughter)* Okay? But the trouble is, oftentimes they’re committed to the Roman church. And now what they have to do is—and you see this everywhere with newer Catholics—there’s an attempt to reconcile what they’re reading in Scripture with the infallible tradition of the church. And the trouble is, it just doesn’t reconcile. And I think you’re absolutely right. It’s hard when you write with an infallible pen, right? It’s hard to change your mind later.

David: *(Unclear)*

Ted: I don’t know—

Jeff: I knew you were going to say something. *(Laughter)*

Ted: I haven’t come to the aid of the Catholics.

Jeff: I hope not.

Ted: I mean, the thing is that Protestantism has followed its own traditions.

Jeff: Well yeah, we’ve already said that. But that tradition has to be subservient—

Ted: The Communion service, what is that actually? I mean, you go talk to an evangelical, an Anglican, a Lutheran, they’ll say, “That way, our way, is the correct way.” If you go to a Baptist church, oh, it’s simply a representation. I mean, that’s just one of many issues. If we had time,--

Jeff: But see, I would say that is more of a theological interpretation that you get no matter where you go.

Ted: Except in the roman church, because they have one interpretation, and it comes from the magisterium. And the Orthodox would do the same thing with their councils. I mean, we have 20- or 30,000 denominations within Protestantism. I can’t imagine that was Jesus’ intention.

Jeff: I want to let you finish.

Ted: No, I just finished.

“The Suffering Servant” Isaiah 53

Jeff: So here’s the way I look at that. Everybody says that denominationalism is sinful, and I get it. You can look at it from that angle. But I go back to the medieval Catholic church which was a soup of different opinions. And then the Reformation hit. You can go back to the Eastern/Western split. But if you go back to the Reformation, the Reformation splits. And you basically have two different streams that emerge—two different divides right there. And the Protestants go in one direction. But they are taking what they think is the best of the tradition and codifying it. And the medieval church goes in another direction with the roman Catholic church and they codify a tradition. And you literally see that in Communion, right? There’s a real presence, right?—a bodily presence. There’s the body of Christ. It’s ubiquitous and I’m chewing it, right?

Ted: Right.

Jeff: And then in Protestantism there are all kinds of different views, but not that one. Transubstantiation is not in Protestantism.

Ted: That’s correct.

Jeff: And so you’ve got two different views, two different strands. Now I would say in Protestantism that you have a multi-different view, just like if we were to ask a question amongst us about a particular theological issue. There would probably be just as many opinions as there are at least half of us here; okay,—depending on the issue.

And that’s the case when you look at churches. The whole point of us getting together and studying the Word is so that we can come to unity in the Scriptures. And I think you can choose to look at denominationalism as sinful, or you can choose to look at it as sort of a bigger version of the individual. And that is that churches actually in their best moments should be coming together with other churches, and it should be an iron-sharpening-iron relationship. Churches should be sharing. “This is our view of this; what’s your view of this?”, being willing to change their position on things—you know what I mean?—and come to closer conformity in the Word.

David: That happens here, doesn’t it?

Jeff: well yes; you would hope that this contributes to that.

Ted: We had people leave this group because they believe that human beings have the ability to choose God, that is unimpinged by God. And when we say, “Why don’t they choose to believe? Well, God has not given them the ability to believe”, there are those who would say, “But He gives everyone the ability to believe.” We have folks who have led this group who hold that position. Now to me, in my mind’s eye, they are no different than all the Catholics, if anyone comes to what do you need to do to be saved?

Jeff: Yeah. So you know—

Ted: I’m going to shut up; I’ve been a distraction.

Jeff: No, this is a great conversation because I want you to think about it. Back in 1904 or 1905 the Presbyterian USA Church merged with the Cumberland Valley Presbyterian Church. And the Cumberland Valley Presbyterian Church had become an Arminian Presbyterian church, holding to the Westminster Confession. But they had actually changed the Confession to reflect Arminianism.

And they were coming together. The reason they were coming together is a fascinating history. The reason they were coming together is because the Cumberland Church was running out of money. And the Presbyterian USA Church was considered the money bags of the churches. And so a couple of guys who were friends submitted in two different presbyteries a proposal for merger. And so that’s what got the merger started.

“The Suffering Servant” Isaiah 53

So B. B. Warfield starts writing not only for the literary organs of the USA Church. But he starts writing for the literary organs of the Cumberland Valley Presbyterian Church. And he starts saying to them, “Look. You should not want us, because we believe differently on some fundamental things.” And what he argued against was superficial unity—you know, just love, let us come together, kum bay a, that sort of thing. He said that this is not real unity. That’s the cheapest form of unity..

Real unity is when we get together and talk. And supposedly our committees have gotten together and they’ve talked about this. But when we ask them what’s said, they tell us to shut up; you don’t want to know—that sort of thing.

But he said, “I don’t detect any real merger of theological thought, so we shouldn’t want this.”

And then what he did was that he said this. What he did was, after the merger happened he published the vote and how the vote shook out—who voted most for the merger and who voted least for it. And basically he showed how it was the most progressive churches that voted for the merger on both sides. But conservatives who valued doctrine and those kinds of things held out on the merger. They ended up merging anyway.

But it’s just interesting to me, and it’s one of those things that illustrates what could have been good. We don’t agree with you; we need more talks. But for now we’re going to stay separate because we don’t agree on this issue, rather than a superficial unity. When you look at the USA Church, it’s just—you know—Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: When we talk about unity,. And the magisterium that has supposedly one view, in the early church you had Arian popes. You had those who embraced orthodoxy. You had popes who said that everyone outside of the Catholic church was damned, that Protestants are schismatics and heretics. And then Vatican II said that we’re separated brethren. And now Pope Francis said to a boy who had lost his father, “Well, he was an atheist. But he’s in heaven because he was baptized.” The whole unity of the magisterium kind of thing is a myth.

Jeff: Well, yes. You get the last word.

Sig: The youngest man in the room.

Paul Sedlock: I don’t know if it’s just the human condition. But I would say that humans love to categorize everything. So we always like to group ourselves into things. And denominations seem no different. And it seems to me that it was the same in Jesus’ time. They were the Jews and they were the Romans. They were the Samaritans, and they didn’t like to mingle with each other then. And we have to be careful of that, because if we start categorizing ourselves, and if we’re only thinking that we are in this category, we start believing only in our categories our in ourselves. And we are kind of forgetting how to start. Does that make any sense?

Jeff: Yes, it does. In fact, when you think about the Christians, think about our own situation today with Republicans and Democrats,—the pressure to identify, right? And you name it from there. But we’re Christians first; you know what I mean? And that means that our conception of freedom goes through the filter of our Christianity.

And so the question becomes because of the political stance, does freedom become an idol for the Christian? Or does our freedom get put through the filter of our Christianity when we hold a ‘correct view of freedom? That puts us a little bit out of step with the political position that we may have affinity with, right? But—

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Paul: We’re all Americans.

Jeff: Yeah. Everything we do, even our Americanism, has to go through the filter of our Christianity. And you’re right; it’s really dangerous for us as Christians to label ourselves in any particular way.

Paul: Remember Jesus. You know, they were kind of giving Him a hard time for spending time with everybody else. But He didn’t see anything wrong with that.

Jeff: Right. Well, let me pray for us and we’ll adjourn. Father, thank You for this day. And Lord, thank You for the conversation we’ve had. We ask that You’ll bless that. We give You thanks, Lord, for Isaiah 53 and reminding us that we believers as we follow Christ walk in His humiliation. And Lord, we pray that You’ll strengthen and encourage us in that because it’s a difficult thought, and it’s a difficult practice. And Lord, we ask that You would bless us in Jesus name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.