

## SERVE THE LORD FAITHFULLY

*52* <sup>13</sup>See, my servant will be successful; he will become high and lifted up, he will be greatly exalted. <sup>14</sup>Just as many were appalled at you—he was so disfigured that his appearance was unlike any other man, his form was unlike the sons of men—<sup>15</sup>so shall he cause many nations to be shocked. Kings shall cover their mouths at [the sight of] him; for what was not reported to them they [themselves] will see, and what was not explained to them they will understand.

*53* Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of Jehovah been revealed?—<sup>2</sup>for he grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him; and when we looked at him, there was nothing in his appearance that would cause us to desire him. <sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected by men; [he was] a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we did not hold him in esteem.

<sup>4</sup>Surely he has borne our afflictions and carried our sorrows; but we regarded him as one who was stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted [as an evildoer]. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment was laid upon him for our peace, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and afflicted, but he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is being led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before her shearers, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>8</sup>By persecution and condemnation he was taken away. But who of his generation considered [the fact] that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people whose punishment was laid on him. <sup>9</sup>[Although] he was assigned his burial with wicked men, he was with a rich man in his death; because he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth.

<sup>10</sup>Yet it was Jehovah's will to crush him, he caused him to suffer. Even though you have made his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring; his days shall continue, and Jehovah's purpose shall be accomplished by his hand. <sup>11</sup>He will see [the fruit] of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant shall justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, I will give him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors—he bore the sins of many and interceded for the transgressors. (Isa. 52:13-53:12)

### **Introduction**

Back in 1964 during a war in the South Pacific islands, Nepalese soldiers were asked if they would be willing to jump from airplanes into combat against the Indonesian enemy. The Nepalese soldiers expressed their willingness to do so, asking only that the planes fly slowly over a swampy area and no higher than one hundred feet.

“But,” explained their commander in chief, “at that low altitude your parachutes will not have sufficient time to open!”

“Parachutes!?!” exclaimed the Nepalese soldiers, “We didn’t know we would be outfitted with parachutes!”

Now there is an example of commitment. Those Nepalese soldiers thought they were being asked to jump out of airplanes and into combat without parachutes—and they were willing to do it! (*Our Daily Bread*, 1/30/94) In that part of the world those brave Nepalese soldiers have always been known and honored for their courageous commitment to their commander in chief.

In the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ we see an even greater example of commitment to the heavenly Father; and we are made to see how greatly God honors the one who serves Him faithfully. If we would be honored by God and would receive the honor that only He can bestow, by His grace we must serve Him faithfully, no matter what we may encounter.

### **I. Serve the LORD Faithfully, Even When It Means Being Despised by the World (Isa. 53:1-3,7-9)**

In Isaiah 53:2 the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, is figuratively compared to a feeble little shoot sprouting up out of the parched ground: *“he grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground.”* One certainly does not expect great things from such a plant; one does not even expect such a plant to survive, let alone grow into a mighty tree or a beautiful flower of the field

Our Lord is further described as having neither an attractive form nor physical beauty, indeed, *“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him; and when we looked at him, there was nothing in his appearance that would cause us to desire him”* (vs. 2b.) In contemporary terms we may say that in His incarnation, our Lord did not assume the physique of a professional athlete or the strikingly handsome features of a Hollywood movie star. There was nothing to be seen in our Lord’s physical appearance and demeanor that would make Him naturally appealing to us. Contrast this description of our Lord Jesus Christ in His incarnation with that of the young men who were selected for positions of honor in the courts of Babylon:

*Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—<sup>4</sup>young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well-informed, quick to understand and qualified to serve in the king’s palace.* (Dan. 1:3-4)

From the description given of our Lord in verse 2 it is no wonder that in verse 3 come these words: *“he was despised and rejected by men.”* The point is that our Lord in His physical appearance and demeanor came far short of what pagan men envision their gods and super heroes would be if they were to assume human form—He did not measure up to what natural men look for and admire in a

leader. Add to the description given in Isaiah, our Lord's own testimony, *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am meek and humble in heart: and you shall find rest for your souls"* (Matt. 11:29.)

Consequently, they looked upon Him with contempt and totally dismissed Him as a potential leader or as a threat to their rule. *"You are a king, then!" said Pilate* (Jn. 18:37.) Such was the Roman governor's incredulous response to Jesus when He stood trial before him. The Apostle Paul declares, *"we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles"* (1 Cor. 1:23.) The fact that salvation comes by faith in the crucified Christ was an offense to the self-righteous Jews and foolishness to the proud and mighty Gentiles.

Note: When our Lord displayed His divine and miraculous power, the crowd was attracted by that power. But when it became clear that He would not employ that power as would a conquering general, they forsook Him:

*Now when the people saw the sign that he had performed, they said, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world!"* <sup>15</sup>*Jesus, perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force in order to make him king, withdrew again into the hills by himself.* (Jn. 6:14-15)

Such was the peoples' initial reaction to our Lord's miracle of feeding the five thousand with just a few bread biscuits and five small fish—but when He resisted their efforts to be their earthly king and employ His divine power against the Romans of that day, they soon raised the cry, *"Crucify him!"* (Matt. 27:22.)

Our Lord in His state of humiliation in the incarnation is further described as being *"a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering."* Jesus the Messiah, in His human nature, was not immune to the effects of the rejection and abuse as He experienced: He knew what it is like to be overlooked, ignored, discounted, rejected, and left alone. Furthermore, it is said of Him, *"like one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we did not hold him in esteem"* (vs. 3c.) In His final earthly hour, when it had become fully evident that His chosen course (of submission to the Father's will) was at total variance with the expectations of the world, He was totally rejected, even by those who were His dearest and closest disciples. Matthew 26:56b, 72 reports, *"Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."* This was the response of His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane when the Lord Jesus refused to resist the soldiers and meekly submitted in allowing Himself to be arrested. When confronted in the courtyard of the high priest on the night of our Lord's trial, Peter declared, *"I do not know the man!"* (Matt. 26:72.)

Yet our Lord Jesus Christ served His heavenly Father faithfully, even though He knew that it would mean being despised by the world (vs. 7-9.) As the faithful servant of the LORD, Christ Jesus willingly submitted Himself unto affliction without raising any protest or making any defense (vs. 7.) By the sinister means of human oppression and unjust judgment He was swept off of the stage of

history and out of this present world (vs. 8.) None of His contemporaries at the time appreciated the fact that *“he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people whose punishment was laid on him”* (vs. 8c.)

Having meekly submitted to the mockery of a false trial, and to the cursed death of the cross, His body was laid to rest in a grave (vs. 9.) *“He was assigned his burial with wicked men”*—they took His body down from the cross and buried it, like they did with the two criminals who were crucified with Him. But *“he was with a rich man in his death.”* Now something unusual occurred. His body was laid to rest in the grave of a rich man; He received an honorable burial—this would be the beginning of the honor that was now to follow upon the successful completion of the Messiah’s redemptive work.

Christian, in imitation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, let us serve the LORD faithfully, even when it means being despised by the world:

*Let us focus our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:2-3)*

*And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. <sup>13</sup>Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. (Heb. 13:12-13)*

## **II. Serve the LORD Faithfully, Even When It Means Enduring Divinely-Administered Affliction (Isa. 53:4-6)**

Verse 4 testifies, *“we regarded him as one who was stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted [as an evildoer].”* That is to say, we saw Him as one upon whom the full brunt of the wrath of God was administered: *“stricken, smitten, afflicted.”* We witnessed Him being executed as the vilest criminal; according to Deuteronomy 21:22-23), a corpse hung upon a tree was the fate reserved for the worst of criminals:

*If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, <sup>23</sup>you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because **anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.** You must not desecrate the land Jehovah your God is giving you as an inheritance. (Deut. 21:22-23)*

We heard Him cry out that He was forsaken by God:

*At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. <sup>34</sup>And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama*

*sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*  
(Mk. 15:33-34)

We regarded Him as a man rejected by God, cursed by God, but we came to understand that He was made to be a curse for us in order to procure our salvation. *“Surely he has borne our afflictions and carried our sorrows”* (vs. 4.) He was identifying Himself with us in our state of sin and misery, taking upon Himself the plagues of body and soul that are part of the consequence of sin, part of life in this present sinful world that is under the righteous curse of God. Questions and Answers #17 and #19 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (quoted below) describe the state of mankind as a consequence of our rebellion against the Lord our God—it is to this state that our Lord Jesus Christ submitted Himself for the redemption of all who entrust themselves to Him as their Lord and Savior.

*Into what estate (or condition) did the fall bring mankind?*  
The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

*What is the misery of that estate whereinto men fell?*  
All mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

Isaiah goes on to say, *“he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment was laid upon him for our peace, and by his wounds we are healed”* (vs. 5.) The righteous judgment of God and the awesome justice of God were enacted against Him in full measure on behalf of all those who put their faith in Him:

*Him [Christ] who knew no sin he [God the Father] made to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.* (2 Cor. 5:21)

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”* (Gal. 3:13)

Then Isaiah concludes, *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Jehovah has laid upon him the iniquity of us all”* (vs. 6.) Here is the statement of universal guilt and the offer of all-sufficient atonement for all who receive Christ. Note 1 Peter 3:18, *“Christ also died for sins once for all, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones, so that he might bring us to God.”*

The heavenly Father subjected His faithful servant, our Lord Jesus Christ, to affliction in order to confirm His obedience: *“Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered”* (Heb. 5:8.) Our Lord’s commitment to His Father was tested by every trial He encountered and that commitment was proven by every act of obedience He rendered in the face of temptation and trial.

Then, as Isaiah 53:4-6 indicates, He accepted that perfect obedience as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of His people.

Christian, in imitation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, let us serve the LORD faithfully, even when it means being afflicted by God. At times, the heavenly Father subjects His children to affliction in order that we may develop in Christ-like obedience and character:

*... you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you; <sup>6</sup>because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and scourges everyone he accepts as a son. ... <sup>10</sup>Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in his holiness. (Heb. 12:5-6,10)*

At times, the sufferings we encounter are a part of entering into *"the fellowship of [Christ's] sufferings"* (Phil. 3:10.)

### **III. Serve the LORD Faithfully, Because It Is Well Worth It (Isa. 52:13-15; 53:10-12)**

In Isaiah 52:13 the LORD pledges that His faithful servant shall be wonderfully exalted: *"my servant will be successful; he will become high and lifted up, he will be greatly exalted."* Despite His suffering and humiliation and death by crucifixion, indeed, precisely because of His faithful acceptance of such suffering, the LORD declares that His servant shall be glorified and highly exalted. The Apostle Paul speaks of the fulfillment of this promise made by the LORD to His faithful servant, Jesus the Messiah, in Philippians 2:8-11,

*... he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore, God exalted him to the highest position and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name; <sup>10</sup>so that before the name Jesus now possesses "every knee should bow"—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—<sup>11</sup>"and every tongue confess" that Jesus Christ is Lord unto the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:8-11)*

These promises began to attain their fulfillment with Christ's resurrection and ascension, and they will yet achieve their ultimate fulfillment with His return in glory: *"the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels ... <sup>10</sup>on the day he shall be glorified in his holy people and be marveled at by all those who have believed"* (2 Thess. 1:7,10.)

In Isaiah 52:14-15 the LORD promises that His servant's exaltation shall be in direct proportion to His previous humiliation: *"Just as many were appalled at you ... so shall he cause many nations to be shocked."* Note: The primary meaning of

the Hebrew word הָרַץ is “to leap” or “to spring.” In the *hiphil* form it usually means “to spirt” or “to sprinkle.” But given the present context, the word as used here is best understood to mean “to be startled,” or “to be shocked.” What is in view here is a leaping or spirting of the emotions when men behold the once battered Christ when He appears in His divine glory at the end of the age. Whole nations “will tremble with astonishment within themselves, being electrified, as it were, by the surprising change that has taken place in the servant of Jehovah.” (Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Vol.2, p.309)

At the first, the suffering that befell the LORD’s servant caused many to look upon Him in astonishment and shock; because His body was so battered and bloodied He presented an appalling sight, having been beaten, scourged and crucified. But at the last, the honor bestowed upon Him shall cause the nations to once again look upon Him, this time in speechless astonishment at His glory. He, in His incarnate state as the servant of the LORD, shall appear in the very glory of God, He shall bear the very Name of God, He shall truly be the visible manifestation of the great God Himself in human form (note again Philippians 2:8-11.) Isaiah goes on to report, *“Kings shall cover their mouths at [the sight of] him.”* At the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ the very rulers of this present world will be confronted with the unspeakable and indefinable glory of God as it is revealed in the Person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 12 of chapter 53 we are told, *“because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors,”* God the Father makes this testimony concerning His faithful servant: *“Therefore will I give him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong.”* What is here stated figuratively in Old Testament terms is revealed in all of its fullness in Philippians 2:8-11; (note, too, Revelation 5:11-13,

*And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; <sup>12</sup>saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb who has been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might and honor, and glory, and blessing. <sup>13</sup>And every created thing that is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, I heard saying, Unto him who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever. (Rev. 5:11-13)*

Christian, in imitation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, let us serve the LORD faithfully, knowing that it is well worth it. The Lord Jesus testifies, *“If any man would serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant also be. If any man serves me, the Father will honor him”* (Jn. 12:26.)

## Conclusion

Mention was made of those Nepalese soldiers who were even willing to jump out of airplanes and into combat, so great was their commitment to their commander in chief. In that part of the world those elite Nepalese troops have always been known and honored for their faithful, courageous service rendered in wartime.

In the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ we see a far greater example of faithfulness and commitment to the heavenly Father. And the Scriptures reveal to us how greatly God rewards the one who serves Him faithfully.

If we would be honored by God and would receive the reward that He alone can bestow, we must serve Him faithfully. Let us look to Him for the grace to do so.