



Week #1 - Hope Rising
by Chris Neal
Isaiah 53:1-2 (CEB)

*Who can believe what we have heard,
and for whose sake has the Lord's arm been revealed?
He grew up like a young plant before us,
like a root from dry ground.
He possessed no splendid form for us to see,
no desirable appearance.*

Into

Throughout the Bible, there is a recurring theme of eyes/sight/perception and ears/hearing/receptivity. God is a living God who sees our pain, hears our cries, and delivers us with his mighty right arm. Idols, on the other hand, have eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear, and mouths but cannot speak. Like people, there are times when we are more like God with ears open to hear God's voice, and other times when we are more like idols with eyes blind to what God is doing in and around us. Throughout the Gospels there are multiple stories of people who are physically blind yet spiritually perceptive; their eyes do not work, but they are able to see who Jesus is. Meanwhile, they are surrounded by numerous religious leaders who have no physical problems with their eyes, but they are utterly blind to the things of God.

Where does this idea of sight and perception, hearing and receptivity appear in Isaiah 53:1-2?

Through

Isaiah 53 is a word to Israel amid several years of exile in Babylon. The Israelites were sent by God into exile as punishment for choosing to worship idols over God. With hearts far from God, Israel was sent far from the Promised Land. God's hope for Israel, while they are in exile, is that they would repent, turn towards God, and eventually be delivered from exile.

The opening words of Isaiah 53 speak of a rising hope that will eventually bring salvation not only to Israel but to the whole world. However, there is a question as to who will hear and

believe, who will see the arm of the Lord (v. 1). Even the servant who will bring about salvation had no “splendid form” nor “desirable appearance” to catch our eye.

Discuss:

- As you think of someone who has “eyes to see” what God is doing in and around us, how would you describe that person? What are they like? What do they do? What do they love? How do you think they cultivate their “eyes to see”?
- How has God worked in unexpected ways in your past? Can you think of a time where you found hope in a dark or broken situation?
- Where in your life now do you need to see hope rising?

Beyond

Take a minute in silent prayer and consider the following questions. Do I have ears that hear and eyes that see what God is doing in and around me? If not, what is currently capturing my love and attention? If yes, what do you sense God is up to and how can you fully participate in that?



Week #2 - Hope Questioned
by Jenn Graffius
Isaiah 53:3-5 (CEB)

*He was despised and avoided by others;
a man who suffered, who knew sickness well.
Like someone from whom people hid their faces,
he was despised, and we didn't think about him.
It was certainly our sickness that he carried,
and our sufferings that he bore,
but we thought him afflicted,
struck down by God and tormented.
He was pierced because of our rebellions
and crushed because of our crimes.
He bore the punishment that made us whole;
by his wounds we are healed.*

Into

It felt like all was lost. Paul Hanson explains, “The exile was a time of profound spiritual searching on the part of the Jewish community. The institutions and customs that constitute the heart of its identity had been destroyed by a ruthless foreign power.”[1] How was it possible for the people of God to be so scattered and destroyed? Weren't they supposed to be God's chosen people? Yet, they found themselves being ruled by their enemies, cast out of their beloved city, and wondering if God would turn his face away from them forever.

The book of Lamentations speaks of this deep grief in Jerusalem.

Lamentations 1:1-4

*Oh, no!
She sits alone, the city that was once full of people.
Once great among nations, she has become like a widow.
Once a queen over provinces, she has become a slave.*

She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears on her cheek.

*None of her lovers comfort her. All her friends lied to her;
they have become her enemies.*

*Judah was exiled after suffering and hard service.
She lives among the nations; she finds no rest.
All who were chasing her caught her—right in the middle of
her distress.*

*Zion's roads are in mourning; no one comes to the festivals.
All her gates are deserted. Her priests are groaning,
her young women grieving. She is bitter.*

Think of a time when you felt especially close to God. What was the experience like for you?
Think of a time when you felt far away from God. What was the experience like for you?
What would it be like if you wondered if you'd ever experience that closeness again or if you
thought you'd experience that distance forever? How would that impact the way you live your
life day to day?

Through

Sometimes we enter into the Christian life under the belief that being a Christian is going to wash away all pain and suffering. But that is simply not true. The Christian life calls us to be unusual...to live outside of the mold set for us by the world and to live into this new kingdom. And that often happens through struggle. Sometimes we think we deserve peace because just because of who we are. And when pain and suffering come, as they often do, we get caught in our anger and pain and confusion. Suffering isn't something we associate with God's gift of peace. Pain and suffering isn't something that we think of enduring through to get that peace that God offers us.

In this Isaiah passage, we are introduced to a servant of the Lord who is so surrendered to God's will that he took upon himself all of the weight of the sin of the community. This servant was innocent, and he was obediently serving God's purpose. When all seems lost, this servant emerges as the one willing to carry to grief, pain, and sins of the community. This is a deep self-giving love.

Discuss:

- Have you found yourself in a season of suffering? How did you navigate your way through that season?
- Israel was in exile because they were not following God's ways. They had begun to make their own plans. Let's talk about consequences...is it fair for the one innocent servant to take on all of the grief and pain of the community? Why does God let this happen?
- Who or what do you live for? What, if taken away, would cause absolute devastation and loss?

- What words or images would you use to describe times when you have felt separated from God? What words or images would you use to describe times when you felt close to God?

Beyond

Take a minute in silence. What is God saying to you? What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture?

[1] Hanson, Paul. Interpretation: Isaiah 40-66. P. 156



Devo #3-Hope With or Without Healing
by Center for Vocational Ministry Team
Isaiah 53:5-10a (CEB)

*He was pierced because of our rebellions
and crushed because of our crimes.
He bore the punishment that made us
whole;
by his wounds we are healed.
Like sheep we had all wandered away,
each going its own way,
but the Lord let fall on him all our crimes.
He was oppressed and tormented,
but didn't open his mouth.
Like a lamb being brought to slaughter,
like a ewe silent before her shearers,
he didn't open his mouth.*

*Due to an unjust ruling he was taken away,
and his fate—who will think about it?
He was eliminated from the land of the
living,
struck dead because of my people's
rebellion.
His grave was among the wicked,
his tomb with evildoers,
though he had done no violence,
and had spoken nothing false.
But the Lord wanted to crush him
and to make him suffer.*

Into

In the book of Daniel, we see a picture of ideal faithfulness in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Without wading too deeply into the details of the story, let us remember their situation. They were Jewish men living in exile in Babylon as government workers for the empire. The emperor had recently built a large statue and demanded that whenever the musicians played, all workers must stop working and bow down in the worship of the statue. However, the next time the music plays, these good and faithful Jewish men refused to bow down and worship this idol, believing that Yahweh alone is worthy of praise, which results in them facing execution at the hands of the emperor. Let us listen to their words in the face of execution:

Daniel 3:17-18 (NIV)

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

We see in their words a commitment to God that transcends their situation. They know God can save them, they believe God will save them, and they will remain faithful to God even if God does not save them.

This is not simply ancient wisdom, but timeless wisdom. Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, shares a story of Admiral Jim Stockdale, who was the highest ranking US military officer in the "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner-of-war camp during the Vietnam War. Stockdale was tortured over twenty times during his eight-year imprisonment. According to Collins, "Stockdale lived out the war without any prisoner's rights, no set release date, and no certainty as to whether he would even survive to see his family again." (*Good to Great*, p.83-84) Stockdale did survive. He became a national hero and spent the later years of his life studying philosophy at Stanford University. When asked how in the world he survived eight years in a brutal prisoner-of-war camp, he explained, "I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade." Stockdale continues, "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end--which you can never afford to lose--with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be." (*Good to Great*, p. 84-85) The Stockdale Paradox teaches us that we must retain faith that we will prevail in the end *and* we must also confront the most brutal facts of our current reality. Faith and hope are more than basic optimism. It is a deep belief that though the current situation is deeply broken, it is not the end of the story.

We invite you to carry these thoughts with you as you read our passage for today, Isaiah 53:5-10a.

Through

Dallas Willard, in his book *The Divine Conspiracy-Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God*, shares that "We are greatly strengthened for life in the kingdom now by an understanding of what our future holds, and especially of how that relates to our present experience. For only then do we really understand what our current life is and are we able to make choices that agree with reality." (*The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 387)

Discuss

- What does it look like to have a faith that transcends uncertainty?
- Jim Collins (*Good to Great*, p. 84-85) says that “Faith and hope is more than basic optimism.” Do you agree? Why? Why not?
- List the verbs found in verses 5-10a. What does this reveal about the Suffering Servant? His compassion? His love for others? His love for you?
- Speaking from your own experiences how can strength be found in the suffering?

Beyond

As a six-week-old baby, the great hymn writer Fanny Crosby had an eye inflammation. Since their family physician was away, a substitute physician came. His treatment caused Fanny to lose her sight. When people asked her if she was angry about losing her sight, Fanny would say that at an early age, she “resolved to leave all care to yesterday and to believe that the morning would bring forth its own peculiar joy.”

A well-meaning minister once told her that it was a pity she didn’t have her sight. She responded, “If at birth I had been able to make one petition to my Creator, it would have been that I should be born without the ability to see.”

“Why?” asked the minister.

She replied, “because when I get to heaven, the first sight that shall ever gladden my eyes will be that of my Savior.”

She wrote several hymns that speak of seeing her Savior face-to-face but this one is especially poignant, saying,

When my lifework is ended, and I cross the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see;
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
And His smile will be the first to welcome me.

Refrain

I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
And redeemed by His side I shall stand,
I shall know Him, I shall know Him,
By the print of the nails in His hand.
Through the gates to the city in a robe of spotless white,
He will lead me where no tears will ever fall;
In the glad song of ages I shall mingle with delight;
But I long to meet my Savior first of all.

While this story is an example of someone who has endured great suffering and has emerged with a new hope-filled perspective, we don’t intend for our sharing of this story to diminish the deep pain of suffering. Hope is not the denial of suffering. It is likely that Fanny’s hope-filled perspective came out of a long journey with many difficult days and nights. We want to be honest about suffering...that suffering is hard...it is a struggle. But we are also a community of hope. We know that suffering isn’t the end of the story. It is with great hope that we endure and press on in the midst of painful life situations.

What has the suffering in your own life taught you?

Dare to reach out and touch your wounds or that of someone you love and be open to what they offer you. In the power of the Holy Spirit, they too may bring you peace and lead you anew with a purpose and passion that you have yet to experience. I know this is difficult, that we feel small and weak and afraid of pain and suffering. But we must not lose hope in the end of the story. We must look for the ways that the power of God is at work in us, transforming death into life, suffering into peace--that God is doing what seems impossible in and through us.

As we close this session, take a few minutes to listen to and reflect on the words of this song:

[**Oh Great God Give Us Rest**](#)



Week #4 - Hope Realized
by Freddy Rivas
Isaiah 53:10b-12 (CEB)

*To take away the sin and guilt of others,
Now the servant will live to see his own descendants.
He did everything the Lord had planned.
By suffering, the servant will learn the true meaning of obeying the Lord.
Although he is innocent,
he will make punishment for the sins of others,
so that many of them will no longer be guilty.
The Lord will reward him with honor and power for sacrificing his life.
Other though he was sinner,
but he suffered for our sins and asked God to forgive us.*

Into

Hope realized – Abraham is promised that through him the families of the earth will be blessed, and his wife bears a son. Hope realized – Moses leads the people out of the wilderness into the promised land. Hope realized – The people of Israel return home after being exiled in Babylon. Hope realized – Jesus the Messiah delivers people from sin into right relationship with God. Hope realized – The people of God live in joy with the promise that we will dwell with God forever. Throughout the Scriptures, God gives messages of hope and allows hope to be realized in a tangible way for his people.

Yet, we forget that when hope is realized, it follows a long journey of challenges, suffering, and perseverance. We find ourselves in the same place – on a difficult journey that ultimately, no matter how agonizing the path, ends with hope made real. This Scripture reminds us that a hope fulfilled follows a long process of sacrifice by the servant.

How long have we waited for hope to be realized in our lives? How many obstacles and challenges do we face as God's people on the road to hope fulfilled? During these times of waiting, people will often say, "Our timing is not God's timing." But what is better to say is this:

No matter where we are in the journey, God's ultimate desire is for hope to be realized in our lives.

Through

Throughout this study on Isaiah 53, we have considered the faithfulness of the Suffering Servant: We asked ourselves if we will open our ears and hear; we saw the agony of the Servant; now the chapter builds to these closing verses where we discover God's hope realized and received because of the faithfulness the Suffering Servant. Out of the ashes of great sacrifice, we see the realization of a hope for all (v. 11).

The Servant brings victory! This is announced in the description of offspring, long life, and the completion of God's plan. The road was marked with pain, but now God works redemption through the sacrifice of the Servant. There was anguish, but now God brings light, as the Servant carries the sin of all.

Who then is this Suffering Servant? The people of Israel, or perhaps a king? Turning toward the New Testament, we discover that the actions of the Suffering Servant are the same as the actions of Jesus Christ. His obedience to death on the cross brought forgiveness and hope that sustains us. No matter where we find ourselves, Jesus's work reminds us that hope and redemption are the final words.

Discuss:

- Reflect on a time when you saw God's hope realized. How did you celebrate? Do you have a story of God's faithfulness to share?
- Reflect on a difficult time in your life; on the journey and then the realization of hope in your circumstance. Why was this season of waiting for hope to arrive difficult?
- In what circumstances now do you wait for God in hope?

Beyond

Read Isaiah 53:10b-12 using the T.R.I.P method of praying the Scripture[1]. Thanks – What is something new that God is offering you in this text? Give thanks! Regret – What is something that is not in alignment with God? Confess to the Lord Jesus Christ. Intercession – Ask God for one specific request in an area that you need hope. Purpose – Ask God to show you a specific action to take based on what he has shown you.

[1] *Daily Texts 2018: Bible Verses and Prayers for Each Day of the Year.* (Alexandria, MN: Mount Carmel Ministries, 2018) 180.



Prisoners of Hope

Devo #5- Hope Shared/Mobilized by Joe Halbert

Isaiah 53:1-12 (CEB)

*Who can believe what we have heard,
and for whose sake has the Lord's
arm been revealed?
He grew up like a young plant before us,
like a root from dry ground.
He possessed no splendid form for us to
see, no desirable appearance.
He was despised and avoided by others;
a man who suffered,
who knew sickness well.
Like someone from whom people hid their
faces, he was despised,
and we didn't think about him.
It was certainly our sickness that he carried,
and our sufferings that he bore,
but we thought him afflicted,
struck down by God and tormented.
He was pierced because of our rebellions
and crushed because of our crimes.
He bore the punishment that made us
whole; by his wounds we are healed.
Like sheep we had all wandered away,
each going its own way,
but the Lord let fall on him all our crimes.
He was oppressed and tormented,
but didn't open his mouth.
Like a lamb being brought to slaughter,
like a ewe silent before her shearers,
he didn't open his mouth.*

*Due to an unjust ruling he was taken away,
and his fate—who will think about it?
He was eliminated from
the land of the living,
struck dead because of my people's
rebellion.
His grave was among the wicked,
his tomb with evildoers,
though he had done no violence,
and had spoken nothing false.
But the Lord wanted to crush him
and to make him suffer.
If his life is offered as restitution, he will see
his offspring; he will enjoy long life.
The Lord's plans will come to fruition
through him. After his deep anguish he will
see light, and he will be satisfied.
Through his knowledge, the righteous one,
my servant, will make many righteous,
and will bear their guilt.
Therefore, I will give him a share with the
great, and he will divide the spoil with the
strong,
in return for exposing his life to death and
being numbered with rebels,
though he carried the sin of many and
pleaded on behalf of those who rebelled.*

Select someone in the gathering to read Isaiah 53 aloud. Make a note of words, phrases, and themes. Though the passage has become familiar, try to be attentive for new and helpful insights.

Into

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul often spoke of the *"mystery revealed."* To the church in Rome, he wrote of the *"mystery hidden for long ages past."*, *Romans 16:25-26 NIV*. To the Christian community in the city of Colossae, he wrote *"...God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery..."* *Colossians 1:27 NIV*.

At the heart of this text is the mystery of the Servant King. A Suffering Redeemer. One who was pierced and crushed for crimes committed by others. One who willfully laid down their life so that all others might be made whole, complete, healed and redeemed. In the middle of what appeared to be chaos to many, this faithful one gave love and compassion at a level no one could have ever imagined. In the midst of death, new life was born. A hope revealed.

Through

However, in the moments following, this unwavering sacrifice dashed the expectations of those closest to the Servant King. It appeared as though the hope anticipated was now lost. It seemed as though the current suffering and brokenness of the world would have the final word.

But we are reminded in scripture that *"The one who calls you is faithful..."* *1 Thessalonians 5:16 NIV*. It is through this faithfulness that redemption reigns.

"If God gives such attention to the wildflowers-most of which are never seen-don't you think that he'll attend to you, take pride in you and do his best for you? Matthew 6:40 MSG.

The Suffering Redeemer came that "you may have life-a full and abundant life." He came in the flesh so that you might better understand what it truly means to live for and to be loved by the Heavenly Father.

In this text, Isaiah was writing to a people that Zephaniah referred to as, "Prisoners of Hope." A people who looked at their own lives and wondered, "God is this all you have for me? We are strangers in a strange land. Is there any hope? Is there any way out?" Thus, enter the Suffering Redeemer. A great King. One who would willingly come to experience what they experienced and feel what they felt. One who would be present in their suffering.

If you are reading this and experiencing suffering, don't ignore it. Don't forget that the Servant King is with you. He is present. He is here to bring hope and draw you into a deeper relationship with himself. Know that suffering isn't the end of the story. Just like the exiles who were suffering in Babylon, God has plans to prosper you and not harm you. He is creating in you a posture of searching for Him with all of your heart.

In recent weeks, we have reflected on the ways that God is doing something new in our lives. We have taken the time to reflect on things that may not be in alignment with where God would have us to be. Through this study, we have been encouraged to confess those things to the Lord and to seek change. *“Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV.* We have also taken time to discuss obstacles and challenges that may come our way.

Understanding that the Christian life is not afforded a “get out of suffering” card, instead, it is a trust relationship, a pressing into the hope only found in Christ. *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and steadfast.” Hebrews 6:9 NIV.*

In “A Farewell to Arms” Ernest Hemingway writes “The world breaks everyone and many are strong at the broken places.”

“Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning...” Lamentations 3:22-23 NIV.

In the world around us, we may feel at times like we are in a sea of the multitudes, un-noticed, isolated and left to figure things out on our own. But we must be reminded and remind one another that God cares and that He pays attention.

Psalm 139:7-12 NIV.

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

***If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”***

even the darkness will not be dark to you;

the night will shine like the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

Discuss

- Think about what the Suffering Servant went through on your behalf. Even if you were the only one alive, do you believe that he would have still made the ultimate sacrifice? Why?
- Consider Luke 15, “doesn’t he (Jesus) leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?” How does that make you feel? Have you received

this gift? If so, are you living in appreciation for what has been bestowed upon you? How are you sharing this good news with others?

- In scripture, God commands us to display His Glory and to influence the world. As believers how might we do that? Does this seem arduous at times? Why? Why not?
- Zephaniah 9:12 refers to those once in exile as “Prisoners of Hope.” What do you think this means? Take a moment and unpack this in the group.
- As a believer do you feel a responsibility to share of the hope that is within you? Why? Why Not?

Beyond

- Be intentional about having someone, a trusted friend, speak into your life this week. Permit them to speak honestly into areas of your life that are not wholly devoted to Christ.
- When we recognize God as Holy One, Abba, Rescuer, and Father, what are we saying about Him?
- Complete this thought “God, as I look at life in light of Christ, your Son, I confess that...”