

The Exalted Suffering Servant
Sermon by Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – 8/14/2016

I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Well, I'd like to start today by taking you on a brief journey to, of all places, the Middle East. It will probably be very hard to imagine yourself there as you sit here in this beautiful green park, but do your best. Here we go:

“East of the city of Jerusalem, the mountainous landscape plummets dramatically [4,000 feet] to the lowest point on earth, the Dead Sea. Some of the most dramatic biblical [accounts] are set in the rocky caves of this region, between the Judean hills and the Dead Sea. Here, in the intense heat of the barren Judean Desert, we can visualize David fleeing from King Saul seeking refuge in the desert's mountain caves, and Jesus rejecting the temptations of the devil. For thousands of years the Judean Desert held secrets buried in its sands, only to be revealed by a young Bedouin shepherd in 1947. The discovery of these ancient treasures initiated a modern-day adventure into the past, revolutionizing our understanding of history and religion.”

“As the story goes, a shepherd of the Ta'amireh tribe left his flock of sheep and goats to search for a stray. Amid the crumbling limestone cliffs that line the northwestern rim of the Dead Sea, around the site of Qumran, he found a cave in the crevice of a steep rocky hillside. Intrigued, he cast a stone into the dark interior, only to be startled by the sound of breaking pots. This sound echoed around the world. For he had stumbled on the greatest find of the century, the Dead Sea Scrolls.”

“Upon entering the cave, the young Bedouin found a mysterious collection of large clay jars. The majority were empty and upon examining the remaining few, he found that the jars were intact, with lids still in place. However, a closer look revealed nothing but old scrolls, some wrapped in linen and blackened with age. He and several companions brought the scrolls to Kando, a Bethlehem antiquities dealer, for appraisal. Intrigued by the findings, Kando sent the Bedouin back to the caves in search of more

treasures. To his delight, they returned with a total of seven scrolls. Blind to their real value, the Bedouin sold four of the seven scrolls to Kando and three to a second antiquities dealer named Salahi. Kando then resold the four scrolls to Archbishop Samuel, head of the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem.”

“When Hebrew University Professor Eliezer Lipa Sukenik caught wind of the Scrolls’ discovery through an Armenian antiquities dealer, he set out to investigate the significance of the finds. Braving Arab-Jewish tensions, he travelled to meet the Armenian dealer at the British divided military zone of the Jerusalem border. In this clandestine meeting, the dealer held up a fragment of leather for the professor to examine. As Sukenik peered through the wire, he recognized the ancient writing. Eager to see more, Sukenik travelled with the dealer to Bethlehem to see Salahi, who was in the possession of three Scrolls. Opening the Scrolls, he was amazed to see Hebrew manuscripts, one thousand years older than any existing biblical text.”

“In his diary, Sukenik recollected: ‘My hands shook as I started to unwrap one of them. I read a few sentences. It was written in beautiful biblical Hebrew. The language was like that of the Psalms, but the text was unknown to me. I looked and looked, and I suddenly had the feeling that I was privileged by destiny to gaze upon a Hebrew Scroll which had not been read for more than 2,000 years.’”

You can come back with me now from the desert to good old Union, Oregon. What I just shared with you was a description of how the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered from the Israel Antiquities Authority. And you may wonder why I just took so much time to describe that discovery to you. Well, I’ve begun in the Middle East with the Dead Sea Scrolls because today I’m planning to walk you through one of the ultimate fulfilled prophecies, or predictions about the future, contained in the amazing book we call the Bible. And the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has affirmed the reality that this prophecy was received and written down in Scripture hundreds of years before it actually occurred. It was not something that was constructed after the fact to fit something that had already happened, as many have tried to claim in the past.

I have with me today a really cool book called the *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*. This is a Bible that was translated by scholars from the actual Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts found at Qumran. These manuscripts were more than 1000 years older than any that had ever been found before and were actually written down many years before Christ was even born.

Now quite a few books of the Bible were found only in fragments at Qumran... their scrolls had disintegrated, leaving only portions of the books readable. However, a few of the scrolls were extremely well preserved in their entirety, including the *Great Isaiah Scroll* and *Great Psalms Scroll*. In the introduction to this *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, it's said that: "...all scholars agree that none of the biblical texts (such as Genesis or Isaiah) [were] actually composed [or written] at Qumran; on the contrary, they all originated before the Qumran period." And do you know when the Qumran period began?...150 years B.C. So in other words, the *Great Isaiah Scroll* found at Qumran was written down more than 150 years before Christ was born. So it's no longer believable when anyone claims that the fulfilled prophecy we're going to examine today was made up after the fact to try and fit the life of Christ.

This prophecy we're going to look at today should really be enough to convince anyone that the Bible has a supernatural origin and is in actuality the very Word of God himself. Do you believe that yet? Well, I'm going to argue that there's no other logical conclusion based on what we're going to see in this prophecy. And I trust that what we'll uncover today will be encouraging and life changing both to those of you who've already come to know Jesus Christ and for those of you who still think he was just a good man with some wise things to say about life.

So if you have your Bibles, I'd like to invite you to turn with me to Isaiah, chapter 52, verse 7, where we'll begin today. The Scriptures I'm going to read and conduct our study from today are straight out of this *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*.

II. GOOD NEWS OF PEACE, HAPPINESS AND SALVATION

Let's begin by reading verses 7 to 10 of Isaiah 52:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one who brings news of peace, who announces good things, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Listen, your watchmen lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they will see the return of the LORD to Zion with compassion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, and he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

So we begin our study with good news...really good news...news about peace, good things and salvation! Some versions of the Bible describe it as good news about peace, happiness and salvation. Clearly, we're about to hear a message that will fulfill all our hopes and dreams and should cause us to start singing for joy. Have you ever heard some good news that made you spontaneously start dancing around and singing a happy song? Maybe you jumped on a table and started doing a happy dance? Well, this is the picture we get here in Isaiah 52.

Now if you consider the writings of prophets in the Bible, you quickly realize that prophets didn't always have a happy message to share. More often than not, they were the bearers of bad news about consequences and discipline God was about to pour out on his chosen people who had so often walked away from him and given their lives and energies to false gods and empty pursuits. However, here in Isaiah 52, the prophet Isaiah has received some amazingly good news that he gets to share with God's people...news of comfort, compassion, redemption, and a salvation that's not just limited to the Jewish people, but is available to people from every corner of the earth. And this good news involves the return of the LORD himself to Zion, in Jerusalem, not to execute judgment on the Jewish people for their failures, but to show compassion and provide a way of salvation to all people.

And what God is going to do, according to these verses, is "bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth will see" the salvation he provides. In other words, God is going to show himself in a really big way that will

be seen by all people and all nations and will provide a way for every person on earth to experience his salvation. What better news could there be than this?! This prophecy through Isaiah is reason to break out your happy dance and spontaneously start singing for joy!

III. THE COMING SERVANT OF GOD

So now in verse 13 of Isaiah 52, the narrative shifts, and a specific person is introduced who will bring about this good news of peace, happiness and salvation. This coming person is described for us extensively in verses 13 of Isaiah 52, all the way through the end of chapter 53, and is called simply, “my servant,” the “my” referring to God.

A. What Will God’s Servant Look Like?

So, first of all, what will God’s coming servant look like according to this prophecy? Let’s read Isaiah chapter 52, verse 13, through chapter 53, verse 3, where we’ll get a very vivid description of what kind of person this will be and what he will look like:

See, my servant will prosper, and he will be exalted and lifted up, and will be very high. Just as many were astonished at you – so was he marred in his appearance, more than any human, and his form beyond that of the sons of humans – so will he startle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths at him; for what had not been told them they will see; and what they had not heard they will understand. Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a tender plant, and like a root out of a dry ground; he had no form and he had no majesty that we should look at him, and had no attractiveness that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others, and a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering; and like one from whom people hide their faces and we despised him, and we did not value him.

Here in these verses we begin to get a complex picture of this coming servant of God.

Interestingly, it's first said that he will prosper, be exalted and lifted up, and be very high. Now if you just read that first sentence, you might think this coming servant was going to come in glory and power and take over the world...you might envision an Alexander the Great who would come and build an earthly kingdom like no other. But wait, as we read on, things start to take a very odd turn. God's servant is described as being marred in appearance...so much so, in fact, that people will be shocked when they look at him, even hiding their faces at his hideous appearance. So on one hand he'll be exalted and lifted up and on the other hand he'll be beaten up and scarred almost beyond human recognition.

Additionally, we learn here that God's coming servant will be a very ordinary person in appearance. He's not going to be an extremely good looking man to whom people will just naturally be drawn. Nothing about his appearance will be kingly or attract people to him. God's servant will be coming to a world that loves good looking people, yet he won't be good looking or attractive, and won't present any aura of kingliness or majesty. It sounds like he's going to be just an ordinary Joe, kind of like you and me.

It also doesn't seem like he's going to be coming from a big, wealthy, successful family either. It's said that he'll grow up before the LORD like a tender plant, like a root out of dry ground. It sounds like the LORD is going to be the source of his life and health and he will grow and flourish in the midst of some very harsh circumstances. He's described as a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering. And he'll also be despised and rejected by his own people, and they will not value him.

Is this sounding at all yet like anyone you've ever heard of before? Imagine for a moment what this prophecy of God's coming servant must have sounded like to the Jewish people when it was written. Isaiah has just told them he's about to share some great news with them, and then he tells them it's about a coming person who will be both exalted and lifted up (terms, by the way, that are reserved for God himself) and yet extremely ordinary in appearance... They're told that he'll be despised and rejected by his people, and undergo suffering and abuse that will leave him scarred and beat up almost beyond human recognition. What a strange picture. This is good news to break forth into song about?!

B. What Will God's Servant Do and Accomplish?

Well, let's continue on in Isaiah and see if the news gets any better. In these next verses we're going to find out what God's servant will do and accomplish when he arrives. We'll pick up in verse 4 of chapter 53:

Surely he has borne our sufferings and carried our sorrows; yet we considered him stricken, and struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that made us whole was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, each of us, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Things are still sounding pretty grim here, aren't they? But we do start to see why this is good news for us. Clearly, this coming servant of God is going to undergo pain and suffering and sorrow like no one else ever has or ever will. He'll be wounded and crushed, endure punishment and receive bruises. In fact, he'll experience so much pain and suffering that people will think he's guilty of some great sin and is being punished by God for it. Yet all the while, the sufferings, sorrows, wounds and bruises he endures, are endured for our benefit and to pay the price for our great sin.

Look at the way you and I are described in verse 6: All of us have gone astray; each of us has turned to our own way instead of God's; and all of us have iniquity or sin. All of us...each of us...the iniquity of us all...These sound like very inclusive phrases, don't they?...not one of us escapes being included...ALL MEANS ALL.

Now when you think about yourself and your own personal history, do you think it's an accurate statement that you've ever been guilty of turning to your own way rather than God's?...of going down paths you knew in your heart were wrong...and then maybe even getting mad at God when things didn't work out quite like you'd planned? Or when you found out the hard way that God was right after all? Isn't that the way we usually operate?

I know this is a very accurate way to describe my own history and the history of every person I've ever known personally. It's the human condition to go our own way and try to do what we want, when we want, and however we want. And

don't you dare try to stop me! Yet we're so quick to blame God for the problems in our lives and in the world, while at the same time ignoring our own role and responsibility for the consequences of our poor choices and constant efforts to go our own way. We've all got sin problems, my friends, and deserve God's punishment for those sins. If you don't believe that yet, this is the first truth you need to grasp today. All of us like sheep have gone astray and turned to our own way.

But Isaiah in our passage today, writing several hundred years before the arrival of God's servant, revealed ahead of time the really good news that even though each of us is guilty and deserves God's wrath and punishment for our sin, God's is sending someone to bear that wrath and punishment for us. This coming servant would bear our sufferings, carry our sorrows, be wounded for our transgressions, be crushed for our iniquities, and take the punishment and bruises that would allow us to be healed and become whole again. This is the good news that's worth singing about!

And as I'm sure most of you know, God's coming servant predicted in Isaiah, was none other than Jesus Christ, the very Son of God himself. Not just a good man or a gifted prophet, but the eternal Son of God himself in human form...exalted and lifted up and very high, yet voluntarily humbling himself and enduring human frailty and weakness and experiencing the worst of human suffering so that the justice of God could be satisfied and we could be healed and forgiven and restored to a forever relationship with the One who created us and loves us more than we can even imagine. Jesus Christ perfectly and completely fulfilled this amazing prophecy from Isaiah. There is not one detail in it that doesn't match exactly the person and life of Jesus Christ.

Let's finish reading Isaiah 53 and see what you think:

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, as a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. From detention and judgment he was taken away – and who can even think about his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living, he was stricken for the transgression of my people.

Then they made his grave with the wicked, and with rich people his tomb – although he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet the LORD was willing to crush him, and he made him suffer. Although you make his soul an offering for sin, and he will see his offspring, and he will prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will triumph in his hand. Out of the suffering of his soul he will see light, and find satisfaction. And through his knowledge his servant, the righteous one, will make many righteous, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong; because he poured out his life to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for their transgressions.

Does that sound like Jesus at all? And who but God could have made up such a strange method of salvation...that He himself was going to offer up his own Son to take the punishment and wrath for sinful human beings who had made themselves his enemies...and in so doing they would find a way to be healed and forgiven and restored to friendship with him? Only God, whose ways are so much higher than our ways, and whose thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts, could conceive and carry out such a plan.

IV. JESUS, THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Now in case you haven't yet made all the connections between this prophecy and Jesus, let me quickly line 10 of them out for you:

- 1) Jesus was oppressed and afflicted and as he went to the cross he was beaten and abused and mocked and marred almost beyond human recognition. Have you seen the movie, "The Passion of the Christ?" Did you want to hide your face so that you didn't have to watch the hideous abuse and beating he endured? I certainly looked away several times.
- 2) Jesus was despised and rejected by his own people and they did not value him, but rather demanded his crucifixion.
- 3) Jesus was falsely accused, mocked and ridiculed, but he refused to defend himself or fight back against his accusers. He endured the pain and suffering silently, like a lamb that is led to slaughter.
- 4) Jesus' human life was cut short and he had no physical descendants.

- 5) Jesus died right alongside criminals and yet was buried in a rich man's tomb.
- 6) Jesus did no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth. He always spoke the truth even when it offended people.
- 7) Jesus sees his offspring, though he has no physical descendants. His offspring are those who choose to trust in his work on the cross and thus come to new life in him, being made righteous through him.
- 8) Jesus' days were prolonged...he rose from the dead and lives now and for eternity.
- 9) The will of the LORD triumphed through Jesus...through his obedience to the point of death on a cross, God's wrath was satisfied and salvation was made available to all. Death was defeated forever as Jesus rose from the dead!
- 10) Jesus was and is exalted and lifted up. Listen to Jesus' own word from John, chapter 17, just before he allowed himself to be arrested and crucified: "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work which you have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." And according to Ephesians chapter 2, verses 20 to 23, the Father answered that request, because Christ is now seated at the right hand of God, where he is exalted and lifted up, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named!

I seriously don't know how anyone can honestly consider Isaiah 53, proven by the Dead Sea Scrolls to have been written down several hundred years before Christ, and not see that we have here the very Word of God and the only path to salvation and new life and hope in the midst of an otherwise hopeless world.

V. A CALL FOR CELEBRATION – ISAIAH 54

It's time to burst into song and shout for joy as we're told to do again in the next chapter of Isaiah. Isaiah 54 calls for celebration and tells us that in this coming

servant, whom we now know is Christ, we can forget the disgrace of our youth and no longer have to be afraid. Why? Because our creator, the LORD of hosts, becomes our husband when we come to Christ, and we become his bride, the ones he loves with his very life.

Listen to some of the ways his relationship and commitment to those who trust him is described in Isaiah 54:

He will gather you with great compassion. He will have compassion on you with his everlasting lovingkindness. His steadfast love will not depart from you. His covenant of peace will not totter. No weapon that is forged against you will be effective. This is the heritage of the LORD's servants and their righteousness that comes from him.

VI. THE INVITATION TO ALL – ISAIAH 55

Does this sound like something you want in your life? Does it sound like a gift you'd like to accept? Well, guess what? You can accept it and the gift is available to everyone. Whether you're already a believer in Christ but just want to move into deeper fellowship with him, or whether you've never yet accepted his offer of salvation through faith in him, listen to the invitation to all from Isaiah chapter 55:

Ho, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy wine and milk without money and at no cost. Why spend your money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; and listen, so that you may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my faithful, sure love for David.

Can you hear the call today and the invitation to true life and fulfillment and endless joy in Christ? It's calling out loud and clear to every person here. Open up your ears and listen carefully to what the LORD is saying to you and you will eat what is good and your soul will delight itself in rich food. In coming near to the LORD, listening and believing his message, you will live like never before and he will make an everlasting covenant of love with you.

Don't put it off till tomorrow. Don't push the LORD aside until you're not so busy. Today could be your last day. It could be my last day. None of us knows when our time is up. God's mercy and forgiveness and pardon is waiting, but there will be a day when it's finally too late and all that will remain for those who've refused the offer of salvation through Christ, will be wrath and judgment.

Listen to more about this from Isaiah, chapter 55:

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous person his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for will freely pardon.

God's offer of salvation through Christ is ever so simple, and there is no one who is too far gone to accept it. In the words of the most well-known verse in the Bible, John 3:16:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Whoever believes can have eternal life. God's servant that was predicted so long ago in Isaiah, Jesus Christ, has forever paid the penalty for your sins on the cross, absorbed the white-hot wrath of God that you deserved, and now offers you new life through simple trust in his work on the cross. He simply asks you to acknowledge and turn from your sin, and believe in his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. That's how you receive the gift he's given to you and enter into the abundant life he wants to offer you with him.

Do you want a glimpse of your future, should you choose to accept Christ's gift and come to new life in him? Here it is from Isaiah 55, verses 12 to 13:

For you will go out in joy, and come back with peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands. Instead of thorn bushes pine trees will grow, and instead of briars myrtles will grow; and they will be for the LORD's sign and for an everlasting renown that will not be cut down.

You see, in Christ, we come to new life. We don't just receive forgiveness and then sit around and wait for heaven. We receive forgiveness, plus we are remade by Christ and given a new heart and invited to walk through life with him and by his power. Life begins to make sense in him. We begin to see how the created world is simply shouting the glory of God and the abundant evidence of his design. He gives us joy as we walk with him and we have permanent peace with our Creator. The problems and challenges of life don't go away, but in whatever dry and barren desert you're walking through, he will enable you to thrive and grow like a tender shoot out of barren ground.

I'm going to sing a simple song for you now as we consider what God is speaking to each of us here today. If you're a believer already, he may simply be calling you to draw near to him and listen...or to be sure that your focus is where it needs to be...maybe just to begin truly believing that everything you need is found in him...or to be sure that you're not laboring and spending all your time and energy and money on things that have no ability to satisfy.

But if you're someone who hasn't yet placed your faith in Christ as Savior, I know he's calling you to do that today...to not put it off any longer...to enter now into the life only he can offer. After this song, I'll lead a prayer that will enable you to do just that today if you're ready.

A Prayer to Accept God's Free Gift of Salvation

God, I admit that I have sinned against You...
And that I have not lived my life for Your glory...
I turn from that sin right now...
I don't want to live my life that way anymore...
Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins...
And that you rose from the dead on the third day...
Right now, I put my faith in You alone for my salvation...
Jesus, You are my Lord and my Savior...My life is Yours...
Thank you for forgiving my sins and making me a new creation...
Thank you for coming to live inside me...
Show me how to live the rest of my life in Your love and for Your glory...
Amen.