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Homiletics

OUTLINES ON ISAIAH 53

By OTTOMAR KRUEGER

I

ISAIAH 53

The preceding verses serve as introduction to this chapter and topic. The chapter really begins at Is. 52:13. The general topic is "God's Servant." Who is this Servant? The Talmud says it is the Messiah. Others maintain it was the Jewish nation or the believers in Israel. Others maintain it was Isaiah.

Proof that the Servant is Christ: John 12:39; Rom. 10:16; Matt. 8:17; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet. 2:22; Mark 15:28; 1 Pet. 1:11.

THE SERVANT NOT GENERALLY RECEIVED

1. *Isaiah Complains of This*

Text. Chapter begins with the complaint that people will not accept the Gospel of Christ. Not Isaiah's first complaint by any means. Cf. Chs. 1, 3, 6, 9, etc. However, nothing is so disastrous as indifference toward Gospel and Christ.

"Report" in Hebrew means "sound or message," i. e., Isaiah's preaching. "Arm of the Lord" is God's power and might stretched out to do marvelous things. He did such things all through the history of Israel and now will do the grandest, viz., send the Savior. But who believes it?

2. *St. Paul Complains of It*

We are reminded by our text of St. Paul's words in 1 Cor. 1:18, 22-24 ff. Isaiah had this experience concerning the coming Christ, and St. Paul found coldness towards, and rejection of, the Savior, who had come and died and risen again. In Rom. 10:16 he quotes the Old Testament Prophet's complaint. Jesus Himself referred to it (John 12:38) when the people would not believe in Him.

3. *We Complain of It*

The human heart has not changed since Isaiah's day, and it never will, Gen. 8:21. The Cross of Christ will always be an offense to many.

Hence we find the majority rejecting Christ today. Progress in the Church is slow.

This does not change God's Servant, nor does it detract from His wonderful person and work, of which we hear more in this sermon series.

God grant that we receive Him and His word.

II

ISAIAH 53:2-3

A reason for the unwillingness of many people to accept Christ is His great lowliness, the lack of all outward show, especially His deep humiliation and suffering.

It is difficult for human reason to grasp that all this should be a part of God's plan of salvation. God's thoughts and ways are mysterious also in this point. Proud man cannot see this.

THE SERVANT'S HUMILIATION DESCRIBED

1. *His Most Unusual Appearance*

Christ is described "as tender plant and root out of dry ground." This refers to His humble origin and lowly circumstances. He was of Jesse's house, born at Bethlehem, reared at Nazareth, poor parents, etc.

Christ had no beauty or comeliness in His humiliation. Text. We think of what Paul writes (Phil. 2:5-8) about Christ. Cf. ch. 52:10.

Christ despised of men. The language here is beautiful. Cf. expressions "Man of Sorrows" and "acquainted with grief." We cannot add anything to that. Other prophecies regarding the same thing: Ps. 22 and 69.

2. *This Agrees with the Bible Account Later*

In the Lord's Passion as described by the Four Evangelists all of this came to pass. He was so miserable as though He had ceased to be a human being.

We think of the mockery at the trials, of the mistreatment, of the miserable appearance before Pilate, of His grief in the Garden and on the Cross, of His torment upon the accursed tree; of His death. Matthew 26—27; Mark 14—15; Luke 22—23; John 18—19.

3. *The Reaction on Us and Others*

Text v. 3 b. People turned away from Him in that day and wanted no part with Him. So also today. Natural man wants no suffering Savior, he wants a hero.

We must look beyond this humiliation as Isaiah does, ch. 52:15. We should take care not to be offended in Christ. Matt. 11:6. We may learn lowliness of Christ.

III

ISAIAH 53:4-5

In many schools the 53d chapter of Isaiah served, with many other splendid Bible passages, as memory material. Especially familiar are these two verses, which are often quoted in Lenten sermons. They give us the solution and key to the whole mystery. If you add the last three verses of the preceding chapter to this chapter, then these verses stand right in the center. They treat of

THE SERVANT'S VICARIOUS PASSION

1. *A Willing Passion*

The Prophet makes a statement of fact, telling us what God's Servant did. "Hath borne" and "carried" do not imply that these griefs and sorrows were thrust upon Him. They rather have the meaning of the Greek *elaben*, which means that He took them upon Himself.

This is correct in the light of the New Testament. Matt. 8:14 quotes Is. 53:4 and declares "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses." This is also according to 1 Pet. 2:24 and Matt. 26:39 and 42.

Hymn 142:3 — "Yea, Father, yea, most willingly, etc."

2. *A Substitutionary Passion*

The language of our text is clear and strong to bring out plainly the *satisfactio vicaria*. The contrast is brought out by the pronouns and suffixes of the Hebrew. The Servant of God and His suffering is set over against our transgressions and iniquities. He suffered not for Himself nor for His sins, but for us and our sins.

God was punishing our sins upon His Son. Climax in "*geplagt, geschlagen und gemartert.*" In v. 5 the strongest terms are used to show complete misery, as "perforated," "ground up," "thrown to earth."

Testimony of New Testament. Cf. Rom. 4:25, 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 3:18.

3. *A Sufficient Passion*

The facts are stated clearly and can leave no one in doubt. The last statement reads: "We are healed." The Servant did not merely begin our redemption, He completed it. His Passion was all that was needed. To doubt that means to insult Christ and the Father, who sent such a Savior.

Christ left nothing undone. We need not atone for our actual sins as Papists teach. Heb. 10:12, 14, 18; Rom. 5:1; 1 John 1:7.

What a wonderful message concerning our salvation.

IV

ISAIAH 53:6

1 Pet. 2:25: "For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." This agrees perfectly with what Isaiah says here.

This is the key to the terrible suffering described before and after our text. The inquiring person seeks for the reason, and here it is.

THE SERVANT'S SUFFERING CAUSED BY OUR SIN

1. *Description of Our Past Condition*

Text. "All we like sheep have gone astray." That implies willing disobedience on our part. Mankind sinned willingly in

Eden, Gen. 3. Adam's children followed in his evil example, and sin came upon us all, according to Rom. 5.

There is no exception to this rule. Ps. 14:3; Eccl. 7:20; Is. 64:6. We, too, are headstrong and willful, turning "everyone to his own way." Cf. Jer. 2:13. As such sheep we had no shepherd to lead and protect us. We were without God in the world. So God did something about it. John 3:16.

2. God Placed Our Guilt on Christ

The righteous God had to do something about our guilt; He punished it upon His own beloved Son. Not just a bit of it and then let that suffice, but the full amount, "the iniquity of us all." Compared with this load of debts, the postwar debt is insignificant (more than 200 billion national debt).

God looked on Christ as a malefactor and transgressor; our sin was upon Him. The Innocent One steps into the place of the guilty. The Good Shepherd (John 10) replaces the erring sheep and lays down His life for them.

God did this in His justice and love: justice towards sin, love towards the sinners.

3. Our Guilt, Then, Canceled and Eliminated

Debts are not paid twice. The "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" has been paid by our Substitute and Savior. We go free. Jesus indicated this in the Garden when He took everything upon Himself and guaranteed the liberty of His disciples.

God is for us; therefore all is well. Rom. 8:31-32.

This is the very center of Christian doctrine.

Let us comfort ourselves with it.

V

ISAIAH 53:7-9

When one reads this chapter one gets the impression that Isaiah must have been an eyewitness of Christ's Passion. He speaks as one might who would have been in Gethsemane, in the Judgment Hall, at Golgotha, yet this was written 700 years earlier.

As Luke vividly describes the voyage of St. Paul to Rome, the storm, the shipwreck, so Isaiah describes Christ's Passion.

THE SERVANT'S SUFFERING IN DETAIL

1. His Trials

Text, v. 7. These words are descriptive of Christ during the various hearings, or trials, which were given Him before Herod, Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate.

Christ was quiet and resigned. He was led as lamb or sheep to His execution. The idea is repeated for emphasis. We are reminded of the Pascal Lamb of the Old Testament and of what John the Baptist said John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18.

When Christ opened His mouth, it was in prayer for His enemies, Luke 23:34. The Ethiopian eunuch read this passage and marveled (Acts 8:32); we, too.

2. His Execution

Text, v. 8. Here we see our Savior, the Servant of God, being led out after His being condemned before Caiaphas and Pilate. Who can fully exhaust this story? We have a *crux interpretum* in the question "Who can declare His generation?" Cf. Luther: "*seines Lebens Laenge ausreden.*"

Then we see Christ being crucified, cut off from the land of the living. The soldier makes certain with his spear.

The thought of Christ as our Substitute recurs again and again in Isaiah 53. It is referred to from various angles. Here also in v. 8.

3. His Death and Burial

Text, v. 9. Christ's death and burial belong to His humiliation; hence this verse must be considered as dealing with this phase of His career. He was buried among the sinners near Calvary, that is, "with the wicked." It was the cemetery for the "place of the skull." Yet He was buried in a rich man's grave, viz., that of Joseph of Arimathaea.

All of this suffering was not the end of the "Servant's" career. Is. 52:15; Rom. 4:25; John 12:32.

Let us hail and adore our wonderful Savior.

VI

ISAIAH 53:10

In Lev. 16:20-22 we have God's prescriptions regarding the scapegoat. This animal was brought to Aaron, and he placed both hands upon it and confessed Israel's sins over it. He put all the transgressions of Israel upon this goat. Then a man took the goat out into the desertlike country, called wilderness, and let him go. Thus the goat symbolically carried away the sins of the people. The man returned, the goat did not.

THE SERVANT AS OUR SCAPEGOAT

1. God the Father Used Him as Such

A scapegoat is one that bears the guilt, shame, or punishment for another. Thus God used Christ. He "bruised Him," "He hath put Him to grief," says our text. He became an offering for our sin, as the goat in the Old Testament. (Isaiah's imagery is drawn also from the goat of the sacrifice, Lev. 16:9).

This was all according to God's plan conceived in eternity before the world began. God provided for our salvation in His Son. Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Cor. 5:19. Hymn 384; 142:2.

2. *God Remains Just Through It All*

This we Christians take for granted, knowing God as we do from His Word. Cf. Ps. 33:4; Ps. 145:9; Ex. 34:6-7. However, we are told here that "the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." So God's work goes forward; He makes no mistakes.

Furthermore, the Savior will "see His seed." This seed are the believers, His followers. There was the Old Testament Church of the faithful and then the Christians of the New Testament. Acts 20:28; John 12:24; John 17:20.

3. *God Accepted His Offering for Our Sins*

The significance of the Old Testament scapegoat. The sins were carried away, and Israel was free. God received the offering given by the people through their priest Aaron.

Here is a greater than Aaron and his sons. Here is our High Priest, who offered up Himself. Heb. 7:26-27. God is satisfied.

VII

ISAIAH 53:11-12

The chapter ends as it began, namely, with visions of great things accomplished and gained. *Vide* ch. 52:13.

First the weight of His tribulation is referred to, and its intensity, but then the glorious results are pictured. The concluding verse binds up the chapter into one harmonious whole. From the literary standpoint there is real unity here.

THE SERVANT'S REWARD AND RESULTS OF HIS WORK

1. *Justification of All Sinners*

The Hebrew conjunction indicates that these now are the consequences of all of Christ's vicarious suffering.

He is just and makes just. He is satisfied at the sight of the justified. Isaiah 11. The Servant shall have a large congregation of righteous as His reward.

The last term, "He shall bear," evidently refers to the high-priestly office of Christ and His intercession for us. 1 John 2:2.

2. *The Spoils Divided*

The Father is speaking of His Servant. Great and prominent sinners came to the Lord as His spoils, cf. Nicodemus, Jairus, Constantine, Charlemagne, etc. Phil. 2:9-11.

As the strong conquerors divided the spoils in history and still do, so Christ, the Lord of Lords, does likewise. He holds the field. His kingdom destroys all others, according to Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The reason for all this success is that "He poured out His soul unto death and was numbered with the transgressors." Cf. Luke 22:37; Mark 15:28; Heb. 9:28. His glorious work of redemption wins the hearts of men everywhere.

3. We Are Saved

This is important for us. The righteous Servant made us righteous and holy. We are among the blessed spoils, thanks to God's grace and mercy.

We have often repented and strengthened our faith by gazing at this suffering and now victorious Servant of God. We trust in His redemption and righteousness.

May this meditation upon the suffering Savior draw us closer to Him and heaven.

A Series of Sermon Studies for the New Church Year

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

2 PET. 3:11-15 a

The Text and the Day.—Following the suggestion of Dr. Martin Luther, the Reformers Bugenhagen and Veit Dietrich appointed the story of the Transfiguration for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany as a proper close for the Epiphany season, which deals with the manifestation of the glory of Christ. Since this Sunday is the last Sunday after Epiphany for this year, we follow the Lutheran custom of concentrating on a text that magnifies Christ's glory, particularly at the end of the world.

Notes on Meaning.—The end of the world is inevitable. The present heaven and earth will be destroyed (see context). But Christians need not fall into terror when they recognize the many signs which point to the dissolution of all things (Matt. 24:3 ff.). The Day of the Lord, which will bring consternation on all unbelievers, will be a day of peace and joy in which righteousness will reign for all believers (Is. 11:5 ff.; 25:7 f.; and ch. 35). In fact, believers in Christ look forward to the coming of the Day of the Lord, convinced that the promise of new heavens and a new earth cannot fail (Is. 65:17 ff.; 62:22). The exhortation of the Apostle to constancy in faith is very much in place. Satan will give neither mind nor conscience rest, and the world can easily deceive the Christian and seduce him into sin. Therefore the Apostle urges diligence in clinging to God's Word (regular reading of the Bible; regular attendance at church services and at the Table of the Lord; daily prayer) so that faith can in-