

“Surely He Has Borne Our Griefs”

A New Things Series, August 15 & 16, 2026 | Isaiah 53:1-12

Rob O’Neal, Senior Pastor

Do you have eyes to see and ears to hear?

A moth hid from me for days this summer.

One day as I was getting out of the shower, a moth flew out of the shower and landed on the exhaust fan on the ceiling. Its brown and grey wings stood out on the stark white of the fan casing. I saw it and went to get a glass to catch it safely, but when I returned, it was gone. I couldn’t find it. The next day, it flew out of the shower again. It had been hiding on the brown and gray tile of the shower, and I had missed it.

I missed something obvious about God when I was a teenager.

When I was 16, my grandparents invited me to preach at Youth Sunday at their church. I preached my first sermon, and a number of people told me I should think about going into ministry. Though I had other career goals, the thought had been somewhere in the back of my mind, too. So, I spent that summer praying. I told God that He didn’t really need me as He had plenty of pastors. I told Him that if He really wanted me to go into ministry, I would need something to say that seemed urgent and important. That summer I heard God tell me plainly, “Tell them that I love them...” The message blew me away when I heard it. It felt like something incredibly urgent and important to say, and like I had never heard before. But I had grown up in church with a fantastic pastor. I had to have heard that message a thousand times before. But somehow, I had missed it. Just like the moth.

When is the last time God surprised you?

I’m asking when you saw something in the Bible or realized something as you prayed that changed or challenged your picture of God. If it’s never happened or if it’s been a while, then that’s a problem because the Bible is full of surprises.

Isaiah frequently pushes us to check our eyes and ears.

He wonders if anyone has eyes to see what is truly happening in the world or ears to hear what God is saying. He mourns the closed eyes and stopped-up ears of his countrymen. He’s prompting us to make sure that our eyes are open to who God truly is and that our ears are open to His voice.

Let’s not build our lives on a blurry picture of God.

That’s the warning Isaiah 53 begins with. God is describing the Messiah or Savior. He is described as a Suffering Servant. Because he is not at all what we expect, most people will fail to recognize Him. If we fail to recognize God’s Suffering Servant, then we won’t see God’s arm—His power and salvation. Can you imagine missing God’s servant, power, and salvation? That would be awful because that’s exactly what we need. So, we want to open our eyes wide to see God clearly.

The Suffering Servant is God doing a new thing.

Isaiah described a Servant of God who was unexpected.

Look at **Isaiah 53:2-3** (NIV '84) again:

... He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

That's not what you expect when you think of a Messiah or Savior. Instead, this is a Suffering Servant. He doesn't draw you in with his appearance or command respect. People are repulsed by him. He is rejected, full of sorrows, and suffers.

He was wounded for sin he didn't commit.

Isaiah says that the Suffering Servant will take our troubles, sicknesses, and sorrows upon himself and that, as a result, we will consider him cursed by God. Then specifically, Isaiah says that the Servant will suffer because of our sins. **Isaiah 53:5** (NIV '84) says,

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

Why?

He died like a lamb being offered on the altar.

Isaiah 53 has a powerful contrast. We are described as being like sheep who have foolishly and stubbornly gone our own way. **Isaiah 53:6** (NIV '84) says,

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

So we sin, but God took our sin and placed it on the Suffering Servant. Then the servant dies for our sin silently and like a lamb. **Isaiah 53:7** (NIV '84) says,

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

Then **Isaiah 53:10** (NIV '84) makes it clear that this is an offering to pay for our sin guilt,

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering

It was purposeful and done out of love. Is that not profound and powerful?

But his death led to new life—for him and for many others.

Isaiah says that even though the Suffering Servant died, he will live. He will be glorified. It reminds me of what Paul writes in **Philippians 2:9** (ESV),

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name ...

All of that is fantastic, and I'm sure for most of you what Isaiah is really talking about is already becoming clear. But something particularly amazed me. Because the servant lives again **Isaiah 53:10** (NIV '84) says,

... he will see his offspring ...

The Suffering Servant, Messiah, is going to have some kind of offspring. These aren't biological offspring. These are spiritual offspring! This verse is already pointing to you and me.

This is a new thing!

God is saying that the Suffering Servant is going to be a Savior and Deliverer. He will pay the price for our sin; that's new. He will live after dying; that's new. He will have many offspring despite having died; that's new! God is doing something new through the most unlikely person! But isn't that just what He said he would do back in Isaiah 43:19?

"Behold,"

He said,

"I am doing a new thing ..."

But there is a question that follows.

Do you not perceive it?

John the Baptist recognized the Lamb of God.

Isaiah described the Suffering Servant as one being led like a lamb to the slaughter. He spoke of him as being like a guilt offering—animals whose lives the Old Testament said were to be given to pay the price for our sin and guilt. In the New Testament, John the Baptist sees that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy and many others like it. In **John 1:29** (ESV) we read,

The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Jesus is the Lamb of God. It's obvious!

Peter directly connected Isaiah's words to Jesus.

In describing Jesus' life and ministry, Peter paraphrased Isaiah 53. Listen to **1 Peter 2:22-24** (ESV),

He committed no sin ... When he was reviled, he did not revile in return ... He himself bore our sins in his body ... that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Peter is saying that Jesus is the Suffering Servant. It's obvious!

Still, the religious leaders and most of the people in the first century missed it.

As I look back, the connections seem obvious to me. I wonder how anyone could have missed that Messiah would look like this. But the religious leaders of the first century missed it. They studied the Scriptures—including the prophecies—extensively, but they did not expect Messiah to be a Suffering

Servant. And many of them came to despise and reject Jesus. But that was the case with many people. Few people in the first century recognized Jesus as the Messiah. And even Jesus' followers were shocked when it turned out that He really was the Suffering Servant Who would die like a criminal for His people's sins and guilt.

Even many Christians in history have mistaken the kind of Lord Jesus is.

When I was in Turkey in June, I got to see many beautiful works of religious art. In the Byzantine era, it was common to portray Jesus as the "Pantocrator" or "ruler of all." Jesus is coming again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But in several mosaics, Byzantine rulers put themselves into the picture. They were usually smaller than Christ and below Him, but the message was unmistakable. The Byzantine ruler is right there with the "Ruler of All." There is a constant temptation to look at God as a road to prosperity and power. He's not. He's the King of Kings and the Suffering Servant. He is always surprising us.

Expect Jesus to surprise and challenge you.

Look again at **Isaiah 53:1** (NIV '84),

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of
the LORD been revealed?

The implied answer is "very few people." God works in His time and in His way. God's timing is not our timing; God's way is not our way. His time and His way may be the time and way we least expect. Are we going to be okay with that? Or are we going to miss God's power at work and even reject it?

Let God save you.

Through Jesus, God does a new thing in you.

Your sin is forgiven and you are reconciled with God. You are given new life and the promise that just as Jesus was resurrected from the dead, you too will be resurrected from the dead. That's salvation. Simply put: Salvation is God's love, forgiveness, reconciliation, new life, and eternal life flooding into your life when you accept Jesus Christ.

Some people struggle to say "yes" to salvation.

George Herbert was a poet from the age of Shakespeare. He wrote a beautiful poem that talks about the way we pull back even from an offer of God's love and the new things God can do in us. In his poem Love III he wrote,

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.

That's the struggle. We hold onto our sin, guilt, and "dust" as Herbert put it. We think of the words we've said, the people we've slept with, the anger we've shown, and the ways in which we have lived our own lives for our own ends, by our own rules. And if we're ever going to be saved, then we assume we have to do it ourselves. We have to clean up our own messes.

Working to earn your salvation is like freely choosing the fate of Sisyphus.

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was an ancient king who defied the gods and was punished by them. Sisyphus was condemned to Hades to push an immense boulder up a hill, only to have it roll down

again. Then Sisyphus' task would start anew—eternal frustration, a fate worse than death. Working to earn your salvation is a task you can never complete. The sin debt that you owe is simply too big. Trying to earn your salvation is like trying to fill a hole that is as vast as the universe, one spoonful at a time. You can't do it, no matter how much you think you can.

Salvation is something to receive, not something to do or to earn.

Herbert puts it so beautifully in his poem. First, Love pulls the reluctant sinner closer,

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me ...

Then Love responds that even though you want to prove yourself and earn your own way into life and eternity,

... know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?

It's a gift of love. Jesus, the Messiah and Suffering Servant, has paid the price for your sin and guilt so that you might be made righteous. That's what Isaiah is saying and that's the Gospel.

So, let God save you.

You don't have to save yourself. You don't have to do it all alone. You aren't alone. You can't do it. But the beautiful and glorious news is that in Jesus, the Suffering Servant, it is done. All you have to do is stop saying "no," stop trying to do life all on your own, and let God save you.

Let God be God.

One of my sons missed something important about God.

I've told you before that one of my sons came home from a student ministry retreat one time when he was in high school. When I picked him up, I asked him what he had learned and experienced on the trip. He excitedly said back, "Did you know that you can have a personal relationship with God?" I just replied, "Oh, you can? Tell me more." Since he had grown up listening to me preach, I knew that his pastor had talked about a personal relationship with Jesus repeatedly. But he missed it. Because sometimes we miss things about God.

Just this past week, I learned that I missed something important about God.

I am studying the life of Abraham in my morning time with the Lord each day. This week I was reading the lead-up to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. I read how the people had been crying out because of the wickedness and how the people of those cities had caused them pain. God had come to earth to see for Himself. And I know how the episode ends—with judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. God is Judge, and He can intervene here and now against the wicked on behalf of the vulnerable. I know that, but it's a side of God I tend to overlook. God is still showing me things about Himself that I have missed.

Are you missing something important about God?

Maybe you assume that God is on your team and can't begin to imagine God loving Red Sox fans, Calvinists, or Libertarians. Maybe you assume that God Who suffered would never ask or allow you to

suffer. Or perhaps you assume that God will never demand anything of you that you don't already want to give. Is God bigger than you think? Is He different from what you assume?

If we're listening to Isaiah, then we need humility about our picture of Jesus, too.

If people in Isaiah's day misunderstood God, and if people in the first century missed Jesus, then I think we can safely conclude that Isaiah is telling us that we will naturally miss important things about Him, too. We have the Holy Spirit Who opens our eyes and ears. Thank God for that! But still, this side of eternity, our eyes don't fully see, and our ears don't fully hear. There is a gap. Always a gap. It's only through the work of the Holy Spirit in us that we ever see or recognize Jesus. So, humility calls us to seek God, study the Scriptures, and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit—even when the Scriptures and the Spirit surprise us.

In humility and faith let's say to God, "I will follow—You."

"You—the Suffering Servant, God-with-Us, God-Who-Sees, God Almighty, the LORD. I will follow—You. I will let You be who You are, not who I want You to be. I will let You surprise me and challenge me. I will trust You and let You be in charge. I will do what You tell me to do. I will follow You now, for the rest of my life, and for all eternity. Because You are God." Let's say that to God.