

Lesson 5

Is 51:17-52:12

The great objective — fight, too — of the Christian life is to be what we are. Not seeking or striving after some future blessing but exploring and experiencing ever more fully the complete salvation given to us in Jesus. Does not the Bible call him our 'righteousness, sanctification and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30)? What more is there? Does not the Bible say that the Father has blessed us (past tense) with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3)? So what more is there to give? Salvation is like a great hamper filled full of every possible blessing of God, and our task is to discover — personally, progressively, ceaselessly — what has thus been given to us once for all. Suppose someone is pronounced 'cured' after a long, weakening illness. Convalescence lies ahead with the constant choice between acquiescing in the body's experienced feebleness, or acting resolutely, maybe even painfully, certainly progressively on the expert diagnosis, and slowly entering into new-found health. That is where we meet Isaiah today. In effect he is saying wrath is over (v. 17), holiness is yours (v. 1), new life awaits (v.3) wake up to what you are and have, and gird your loins for a new Exodus. Believe that his wrath is a thing of the past, dress yourself in your new robe of righteousness, start walking the separated pathway. Yahweh has himself taken away his wrath (v. 22), himself accomplished the total work of salvation (v. 10), and himself will accompany you protectively on your journey (v. 12). Let us ask ourselves why Romans 8:30 says that the Lord 'glorified us', using the same past tense as when it says he 'justified' us? Or why does Ephesians 2:6 speak of us as already seated in the heavenly places? Or Colossians 3:1 that we 'were raised with Christ'? This is a divine expert diagnosis like the doctor's pronouncement 'you are cured'. We feel our weakness; we are summoned to lay hold on our strength.

1. Read Isaiah 52:13-15; 53:2-3. The description of the Servant's external appearance in contrast to his high and exalted state seems counter-intuitive to us. How is this fulfilled in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection?

2. In Isaiah 53:1 there is a note of astonishment and even incredulity. What about God's redemptive plan, revealed in Isaiah, would lend itself to such a response as, "Who has believed what he has heard from us?"

3. In Isaiah 53:4-9 we have the heart of the passage, and in many ways the heart of the gospel. Why are the details of Servant's treatment here so crucial for our understanding of his ability to atone for our sins?

4. How does the Servant redeem and make atonement for the people (cf. 53:11)? Read Hebrews 9:11-14. How do these two passages inform and build off one another?

5. Read Isaiah 53 out loud if possible. What impact does it have on your understanding of the gospel? Write out a prayer of praise in response to God's provision of atonement.