

By His Wounds, A study of Isaiah 53
The Silent Jesus, Isaiah 53:7-8
Exegetical and Supplementary Notes
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Notes are gleaned from a number of sources, one most notably, Concordia Commentary, Isaiah 40-55, by Reed Lessing.

Isaiah 53:7-8 describes Jesus as the Lamb for sacrifice who is led silently to slaughter without opening His mouth and without complaint. He is oppressed and afflicted yet He does not cry out. He is stricken for the transgressions of God's people yet remains quiet.

Isaiah 53:7-8 reads, **He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?**

Jesus did not come as an Emperor, political leader, or investment banker. His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts. The all-powerful, all knowing, all present second person of the Trinity is The Suffering Servant. He is described by Isaiah with these words, "He grew up before him like a young plant" (53:2). As a human being, he was vulnerable from the time of His conception in the womb. He was wrapped in swaddling cloth and placed in a manger because there was no room for Mary and Joseph, and His birth, in the Inn. When King Herod learns of His birth he seeks to have Jesus killed and so Mary and Joseph and the baby must flee to Egypt. Isaiah 53:3 prophesied that "He was despised and rejected by men!" Detractors accused Him of Blasphemy when He proclaimed forgiveness to the paralyzed man in Mark 2:7. In Matthew 9:34 He is called the prince of demons. And the final nail in the cross is the mockery and taunts of the crowd who cry out, "Crucify Him" (John 19:15). Jesus was stricken, smitten, and afflicted. Jesus was pierced and crushed. Jesus was like a lamb led to slaughter. And Jesus was cut off from the land of the living (53:8) [cf. Lessing, p. 623].

And by His wounds we are healed. The Suffering Servant delivers the grace and mercy of God according to Covenant and promise. “The Righteous One, my Servant, will justify the many” (53:11). The Servant delivers what is most needed and what God desires for His creation. The Servant delivers forgiveness, redemption, and atonement.

Forgiveness is the central message of Scripture and the central message of the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 6:6-7, Isaiah objects to his Calling. He confesses that he is a man of unclean lips and dwells among people of unclean lips. But then God sends one of the seraphs with a live coal taken from the altar. With the coal he touches the lips of Isaiah and says, “Behold, the coal has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for.”

From the altar of Calvary, God touches us with the Servant’s blood and forgiveness. Jesus is the burning coal from the altar of the Cross. Romans 8:32 declares, “He who did not spare His only Son but gave Him up for us all, how will he not also, along with Him graciously give us all good things.”

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 purifies our lips and our lives with the wounds He suffers on our behalf. He becomes the burnt offering. He becomes the Lamb for sacrifice. He becomes the scapegoat. He becomes Ugly and hated, broken and silent, lonely and anguished for you and me and the people He has come to save. He becomes all of this and more. And by His wounds we are healed. By His wounds we are atoned for. By His wounds we are forgiven and made righteous and holy.

Isaiah 53:7-9 begins with procession and ends with execution and burial. Yahweh, in his role as Shepherd (judge) leads the rejected lamb to slaughter. The servant is not only marginalized, made ugly, hated and rejected, he is also a slaughtered Lamb and a sheep stripped naked. Both ideas evoke images of horror and execution, not unlike the death camps of Nazi Germany. Death is not injury and insult enough. There is also paralyzing humiliation, shame, and indignity. (Recall the nakedness and shame of Adam and Eve, Genesis 3).

To be “shaved and shorn” was a sign of curse, “They shall not make bald spots on their heads or shave off the edges of their beards (Leviticus 21:5; Numbers 6:1-21; etc.).

Two times Isaiah 53:7 notes that in the face of death the Lamb is silent and does not open His mouth. This is unusual action. Normally, in the Old Testament, sufferers protest, sometimes vehemently. They cry out to God and to their persecutors. Jeremiah, Job, and many of the Psalms – “How long, O Lord, how long!” (Ps 6).

But here, the Suffering Servant is silent, and odd in this. Even though his day in court results in being wrongly accused, judged, sentenced and put to death, he issues no protests and makes no defense. When reviled, He did not revile back (cf. Lessing, p. 618).

The Silence is deafening. Jesus speaks more in His silence than He does in His speaking. Of course He does not cry out in His defense. He does not complain of the injustice. He does not shout in pain or horror. He does not criticize those around Him. He does not point fingers of accusation. He is not sarcastic or cynical. He is not bombastic or pompous. He does not rant or rave.

But more importantly, more mercifully, The Suffering Servant does not speak of our sins or the sins of those who deny Him, or betray Him, or slander Him. The Suffering Servant says nothing of those who drive the nails, except that the Father would forgive them. The Suffering Servant says nothing of those who mocked Him, or beat Him, or steal His clothing. The Suffering Servant is silent.

Isaiah 42:1-4 is one of the four servant songs of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4; Isaiah 49:1-6; Isaiah 50:4-7; Isaiah 52:13-53:12). In this song, also, we read of the Servant who remains quiet in His suffering and quiet in His accusation. Isaiah 42:2-3 says, **“² He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. ³ A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.”**

The meekest and the weakest are at ease in the care of the Suffering Servant. The bruised reed is not broken. The smoldering wick is not extinguished. The Suffering Servant has come to seek and to save all who are lost. He sits with sinners and eats with them. He searches for lost sheep. A woman with an issue of blood is healed by touching the hem of his garment. A blind beggar cries out for mercy from the roadside dust and

he is healed. A penitent thief is given pardon and peace and promised that “this day you will be in paradise.”

There is no judgement or condemnation. There is no accusation. There is no question of “how can you do what you do?” There are no haughty statements, “You should have known better.” There are no inquiries of “What were you thinking?”

In Matthew 26:62-63, The Suffering Servant stands before the high priest. He is on trial and is questioned for the accusations brought about Him. But the Suffering Servant remains silent. **“Then the High Priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? But Jesus remained silent. The High Priest said to Him, “I charge you under oath of the Living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”**

Again, in Matthew 27:14, we read of The Suffering Servant, Jesus, standing before Pontius Pilate. Here again He remains silent. **“But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge – to the great amazement of the governor.”**

And before Herod, Luke 23:9, **“Herod plied Jesus with questions, but Jesus gave no answer.”**

Quietly, silently, like a man about His business, The Suffering Servant takes the punishment and wrath that is ours on account of our sin. Like a Lamb led to slaughter, like sheep before her shearers, Jesus is Silent. And yet, He speaks.

In the Lutheran Service Book (LSB), hymn 438, we sing, **“A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth.”** It is a beautiful hymn that speaks the silence of the Lamb of God and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:

**1. A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth,
The guilt of all men bearing;
And laden with the sins of earth,
None else the burden sharing!
Goes patient on, grow weak and faint,
To slaughter led without complaint,**

That spotless life to offer;
Bears shame and stripes, and wounds and death,
Anguish and mockery, and saith,
"Willing all this I suffer."

2. This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great Friend,
The Lamb of God, our Savior;
Him God the Father chose to send
To gain for us His favor.
"Go forth, My Son," the Father saith,
"And free men from the fear of death,
From guilt and condemnation.
The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,
But by Thy Passion men shall share
The fruit of Thy salvation."

Marie Greenway, a Lutheran school teacher, has written the following commentary on the hymn, "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth." Her commentary is devotional in nature and promise, and gives insight to the Isaiah 53:7 and also the Truth of the Silent, Suffering Servant. I share a portion of it here:

Paul Gerhardt wrote this hymn in 1648, clearly in meditation of Isaiah 53:7. The hymn begins with an immediate image of the Lamb, the weakest and innocent of creatures. Unlike the dumb and unintelligent animals we see here on earth, however, this Lamb possesses full knowledge of His work and course in life – and full knowledge of the sins of those He has come to save, too. This Lamb is no clueless creature, but rather is certain of what is happening to Him and the way it will end.

And yet, He goes to slaughter "without complaint." This weak, innocent creature fully realizes His suffering under the weight of His load of the "guilt of sinners" and "the sins of earth" and yet utters not one word of protest. He bears both physical and mental abuse, but this Lamb agrees not only to suffer those things but to do it gladly. The words of stanza 1, then, present the focus of the entire hymn: not the sinner, but the Lamb. The Lamb who wildly and irrationally, or so it seems, suffers for others with gladness.

(Marie Greenway, teacher, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Alexandria, Virginia; CPH blog, February 27, 2018. You can read the rest of Ms. Greenway's commentary at <https://blog.cph.org/worship/2018/02/lenten-reflection-on-a-lamb-goes-uncomplaining-forth>)

The Silence of the Lamb is golden. The Silence is pure. The Silence is merciful and forgiving. There is no condemnation for those who trust in the Suffering Servant and the merits of His silence. Romans 8:1 states, **“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”**

Silence proclaims the atoning and redeeming work of God who does not treat our sins as they deserve. Silence communicates the love of God who is forever patient and kind and who does not keep a record of our wrongs. Silence is grace and gift, neither earned nor deserved but received in silent confidence and faith. The Suffering Servant is the fulfillment of the New Covenant.

Micah 7:18 reminds us, **“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgressions of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever, and you delight in showing mercy.”**

Jesus, the Suffering Servant, the Lamb for sacrifice, suffers all for all. And by His wounds we are healed.