

God's Servant Acts Wisely

✠ appearance deceiving (vv.13-14)

✠ blood bath for the nations (v.15)

In the Name of God's Servant, our Savior Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Imagine you were a doctor or a nurse with advanced medical training. A child is sick with something easily cured if you can just get the right medicine. But then you check your medical supplies, and the shelves are empty. Suddenly the prospect seems very real that the child you want to save will die. This is the possible trauma our nurses face every day in our Central Africa Medical Mission. When government regulations limit or eliminate medical supplies, people suffer. And so do souls when theologians and pastors limit or eliminate the all-sustaining Gospel of God's grace.

According to one commentary, up until 1150 A.D., even the Jews recognized the Servant Songs of Isaiah pointed to the Messiah.² The most powerful of these four songs of Christ's suffering and triumph begins for us tonight. But many Christian writers go out of their way to deny this could be about Jesus. One highly intelligent theologian said the idea of redemption did not develop until after the Exile in Babylon, but here Isaiah is writing 100 years before. Can we believe this? **God's Servant Acts Wisely.**

✠ appearance deceiving (vv.13-14)

Everyone who came by car tonight, did you stop to think of spark plugs firing and fuel flowing? Coming in to get a drink before worship, did you think of the plumber who worked so hard to connect the supply lines for that liquid refreshment? While the lights are on do you ever think of the electrical current coursing through wires you never see behind the walls? Sources of hidden power and the skills of tradesmen are all around us. But we don't even notice unless the car won't start, the water runs brown or the lights flicker and die. So much of life is invisible to us. Any wonder appearances can be deceiving?

Our first verse would be highly desirable to the ancient Jews. Even Jesus' disciples like Peter and Judas would have enjoyed thinking of Jesus as this kind of Messiah: **"Look, my Servant will succeed. He will rise. He will be exalted. He will be greatly glorified."**³ Yet hidden behind the fact that **"He will rise,"** is the necessity that He first must die. To be **"exalted"** He will have to be humiliated. To be **"glorified"** He will first need to be put to shame. Like building a house or repairing cabinets, plumbing or wiring, you often have to dig down deep and destroy things before you can fix them.

And this is where Old Testament believers like Isaiah would have to wonder what can this mean? **"...many were appalled at him..."** – Why would they be stunned, devastated, horror stricken to look at the LORD's Servant? What kind of suffering would leave **"his appearance so disfigured"** that he would **"not look like a man"**? What kind of trauma would make **"his form so mutilated more than any human being"**? This is not the way to make up religious stories for people to put their faith in imaginary heroes.

300 years before Isaiah, another God inspired writer quoted the Messiah Himself: **"Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me....the darkness is my closest friend."** (Psalm 88:16-18 NIV84) Why would the Anointed One of God have to suffer such deep degradation and painful shame?

¹ Midweek Lenten Series: *God's Servant + Our Savior* at New Life Evangelical Lutheran, Shoreview, Minnesota.

² Kauffeld, Rev. Eugene. *Books of the Way of the Lord – Eleven Divine Portraits of Jesus, the Messiah in the Old & New Testament.* Menomonie, Wisconsin: Books of the Way, 2006, p.247. Order from www.booksoftheway.com.

³ The words of this sermon text are part of my draft review for a translation project. [M.C. 2/24/2016]

There was a clue in our Penitential Psalm for tonight. A king whom God called *“a man after my own heart”* (Acts 13:22), had committed murder trying to cover up his adultery. David himself had to admit: *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”* (Psalm 51:5 NIV84) Like David, we would never want to look at God’s movie of our life. It would have to start before we were born and show us to be sinners while still inside our mother’s womb. Just today the movie would make you feel dirty watching all the evil thoughts and feelings that ran through your mind and heart. Where would they show all the kind words we failed to speak or the good deeds that we left undone? How many opportunities did we neglect today just because we were so wrapped up in our own little lives? How much pride and impatience would darken this film in the dense smoke of our sins? And how dreadful to think that this movie would never end. It would have to continue into eternity beyond our death in that place where Isaiah also was inspired to write: *“Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”* (Isaiah 66:24 NIV84)

Appearances are deceiving. We may look okay to ourselves and others, upright citizens. But *“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”* (Isaiah 64:6) What would it take to remove the infinite sins of all sinners who ever lived? Would it not take infinite power, infinite holiness, infinite love? Only God could see our need. Only God could take care of it. No human being would think we need a...

✠ **blood bath for the nations (v.15)**

On a flight home from the West Coast, I was fascinated by a PhD candidate who told me something strange. She said that medical science has not been able to explain, much less cure any neurological illnesses like mental disease or dementia or Alzheimer’s. “None of them?” I asked. She answered, “That’s right. Not one. We’re guessing at best how to treat the brain and nervous system.”

Dear friends, if that’s true of the human body where we can test and probe and experiment, how much more true must it be for the human soul that we cannot see, much less explain, or heal or purify? I’ll never forget one former Mormon missionary admitting how grateful he was to hear what I’m about to tell you. As he looked back on all his efforts to be a good Mormon he sadly admitted, “But we could not make ourselves clean on the inside.”

Here’s what God said His Suffering Servant would do: *“He will sprinkle many nations.”* Isaiah’s Jewish readers would know that this was referring to the way their temple priests would sprinkle the people with innocent blood from sacrificial animals. But they knew it was *“impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”* (Hebrews 10:4 NIV84) There would have to be a more lasting sacrifice than all those innocent animals. And you and I have heard what it was because we stood with the crowds on the banks of the Jordan River while John the Baptist pointed to Jesus of Nazareth saying, *“Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29) God wants you to hear this again tonight so that you know for sure another day’s sins are completely and eternally forgiven: *“The blood of Jesus, [God’s] Son, purifies us from all sin.”* (1 John 1:7 NIV84) It took infinite suffering powered by infinite love in infinitely holy blood to wash away the infinite sin of your life and mine.

“Because of him, kings will shut their mouths.” Rulers who repent of their sins will quietly receive God’s forgiveness for them too. Tyrants who refuse will *“shut their mouths”* in terror on their way to eternal torment on the Last Day. How eagerly God wants them and all of us to believe this success story of God’s Suffering Servant was and is to this day our own success story for all eternity. We too have had a bath in His blood by faith, a **blood bath for the nations**. *“For they see what they had not been told, and what they had not heard they understand.”* Even people with personalities and backgrounds as different as ours can marvel at the understanding God gives to childlike hearts. By God’s grace we believe and perceive God’s loving kindness and tender mercy. And the more I read mission stories in *Forward in Christ*, the more amazed I am at the success of God’s Servant who suffered for us all to be our Savior from sin. In Christ our hearts unite for time and eternity. We will be forever praising Jesus. **God’s Servant Acts Wisely.** Amen.

For the study behind this sermon or for copies email m.cordes@comast.net .
You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife .

New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church
180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126