

# Doing the Unthinkable<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—MAY 29

**TO REACH UNREACHABLE<sup>2</sup> PEOPLE.** Lough Fook, a Chinese Christian, was touched with great love for the people of his country who had become slaves in African mines. He wanted to give these people the hope of salvation. But how could he reach them? His answer was to sell himself for a period of five years as a slave. So he was moved to the mines where he worked as a slave and told his fellow workers about Jesus.

When Lough Fook died, he had helped 200 of his people accept Jesus as their Savior.

Lough Fook did the unthinkable. He took “the form of a slave” (Philippians 2:7). Jesus also took “the form of a slave” to save us from sin. This week, we will study how Jesus did this. Isaiah prophesied He would do this hundreds of years before He did it.

**A LOOK AT THIS WEEK’S LESSON:** How does Isaiah prepare us for Jesus’ death? How does Isaiah show Jesus in His death? What is the important theme in Isaiah 53? How does Isaiah 53 show how sacrifice brings forgiveness and renewal<sup>3</sup> to all people?

**MEMORY VERSE:** “But because of our sins he [Jesus] was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered, made whole [well] by the blows he received” (Isaiah 53:5, TEV).

<sup>1</sup>unthinkable—something we would not think of doing or saying.

<sup>2</sup>unreachable people—people who are not able to be reached. In this week’s lesson, unreachable people are sinners who are lost.

<sup>3</sup>renewal—to make new.

SUNDAY—MAY 30

**ISAIAH'S TESTING TRUTH  
(Isaiah 50:4-10).**

Isaiah wanted to teach, encourage, and give his readers an experience with the Servant of the Lord. So he developed rich poetry about the Servant's sacrifice for all people. Isaiah wrote this poetry in parts so we could understand each thing about the Servant that we need to know. Isaiah is an artist who uses the soul of his listener as his canvas.<sup>4</sup>

**Summarize what Isaiah 50:4-10 says about the Servant. How do you see Jesus in these verses?**

We found in Isaiah 49:7 that God's Servant is the hated "slave of rulers."



**"I bared my back to those [people] who beat me" (Isaiah 50:6, TEV).**

But He is the One kings shall see and stand up for. He is the One princes shall prostrate<sup>5</sup> before. In Isaiah 50, we learn that the valley is deeper for the gentle Teacher whose words give support to tired sinners (Isaiah 50:4): The path He must take leads through physical abuse (Isaiah 50:6).

This abuse sounds bad to those of us in modern Western cultures. But in a Near Eastern culture before or during Jesus' time, honor was a life and death matter for a person and his or her group. If you insulted and abused someone, you better be ready to protect yourself, because the victim and his or her group would surely fight back.

King David attacked and conquered the country of Ammon (2 Samuel 1–12). Why? Its king had "seized David's envoys [messengers], shaved off half the beard of each envoy, cut off their garments [clothes] in the middle at their hips, and sent them away" (2 Samuel 10:4). But in Isaiah 50, people strike the Servant. They pull out hairs from His beard and spit at Him. These actions are a universal issue because the victim is the Messenger of the King of kings (God). But by comparing<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 9:6, 7 and Isaiah 11:1-16 with other "servant" verses, we find that the Servant is the King of kings. He is the powerful Savior! With all this power and honor, why does He not save Himself? People do not understand why He does not save Himself. At Jesus' cross, leaders mocked (laughed at) Him: " 'He

<sup>4</sup>canvas—the material which an artist uses for oil painting.

<sup>5</sup>prostrate—lying on the ground with your face down.

<sup>6</sup>comparing—showing how things are the same.

saved others [people]; let him save himself if he is the Christ [Messiah] of God, the Chosen One!’ ” “ . . . Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him’ ” (Luke 23:35, NIV; Matthew 27:42, NIV).

**Write down the spiritual principles<sup>7</sup> in Isaiah 50:4-10 that we should use in our own lives. Which of these principles do you need to work harder on? Do not be discouraged. The rest of this week’s lesson offers help.**

### MONDAY—MAY 31

#### THE SUFFERING SERVANT POEM (Isaiah 52:13–53:12).

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is the “Suffering Servant Poem.” Each phrase in the poem is short. But each phrase is filled with deep meaning that shows how hard God tries to save a group of people lost in sin.

Isaiah has prepared his readers for Isaiah 52:13–53:12 by developing the theme about the Messiah from the early part of his book. Following the Messiah’s life on earth, Isaiah pointed to His start in His mother’s womb and His birth (Isaiah 7:14). He introduced Him as a king from David’s family (Isaiah 9:6, 7). He described His work of bringing Israel back to God (Isaiah 11:1-16). He showed His ministry (work) of saving people from injustice and suffering

(Isaiah 42:1-7). Then Isaiah described the Messiah’s death and glorious return to life (Isaiah 49:1-12; Isaiah 50:6-10). Isaiah explores the sad subject of the Servant’s experience on the cross.

**Read again Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:6, 7; Isaiah 11:1-16; Isaiah 42:1-7; Isaiah 49:1-12; and Isaiah 50:6-10. What do these verses tell us about the Messiah Jesus? How do they help prepare us for what is coming in Isaiah 52 and Isaiah 53?**

Isaiah 52:13–53:1 introduces the poem with a shocking difference: The Servant will succeed and be glorified. But His face will be so changed that people will not recognize Him.

Isaiah 53:2, 3 begin a painful downhill walk from the Servant’s beginning and plain looks to His sorrowful death on the cross. Isaiah 53:4-6 explain that His suffering is really our punishment. He accepts our punishment to heal us. Isaiah 53:7-9 continue the innocent Servant’s journey to the tomb.



**“He was arrested and sentenced and led off to die” (Isaiah 53:8,TEV).**

<sup>7</sup>principles—basic rules that guide the making of other rules and that help us decide what to do.

In Isaiah 53:10-12, the Servant receives the glorious reward at the beginning of the poem in Isaiah 52:13. Isaiah 53:10-12 also adds that His sacrifice to save other people is God's will.

Compare<sup>8</sup> the "valley" shape of Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus begins as God, but lowers Himself to become a human. He then humbles Himself to the lowest of all deaths: death on a cross. Therefore, God highly honors and glorifies Him so that everyone should accept Him as Lord (compare Isaiah 49:7).

**Write down everything Isaiah 52:13–53:12 says that Jesus has done for us. How has what Jesus done for us changed your life?**

## TUESDAY—JUNE 1

### WHO HAS BELIEVED (Isaiah 52:13–3:12)?

In Isaiah 52:13, God's Servant is greatly honored. But without warning, Isaiah 52:14 describes His face as so changed that people cannot recognize Him as one of the "sons of men." The New Testament describes the things that changed Jesus' face: whipping, a crown of thorns, crucifixion, and accepting all the sins of the human race. Sin is not natural for humans. For this reason, accepting sin made the "Son of Man" appear inhuman.

Take the story of Job, for example. He suddenly dropped from a position of great wealth, honor, and power to a poor,

suffering cripple sitting among ashes on the ground and scraping his painful sores (Job 1; Job 2). Job looked so different, not even his friends recognized him at first (Job 2:12). Job did not deserve to suffer. The Messiah did not deserve to suffer. So why did they suffer?

**Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12, then list the places where the theme of an innocent person suffering for guilty people appears. What is the important message here for us?**

The question in Isaiah 53:1 points to the challenge of believing the unbelievable (compare John 12:37-41). They warn us to read the rest of the story carefully. But the questions also encourage us to accept God's salvation. The connection between the two questions suggests that the Lord's army (power) of salvation (Isaiah 52:10) is offered to people who believe. Do you want to experience God's saving power? Then believe!



Jesus gave His life to save us from sin.

<sup>8</sup>compare—show how things are the same.

**What is the special message in Isaiah 53:6? How does this verse give you hope as a sinner?**

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 2

**WE ARE UNREACHABLE  
(Isaiah 53:3-9).**

A vulnerable (weak) plant, of no special value, and hated (Isaiah 53:2, 3). That is the picture given to us of the Suffering Servant. Isaiah has quickly brought us through innocent youth to the worst part. Even with Isaiah's warning in earlier verses, we are not ready to accept the Servant's experience on the cross. Isaiah has taught us to hold dear the Child born to us, the supreme Prince of Peace. Other people hate Him. But we know who He really is.

As someone has said: "We have met the enemy, and they (the enemy) are us." The Servant is not the first person to be hated or to be "a man of suffering." King David experienced hatred and suffering when he fled from his son, Absalom (2 Samuel 15:30). But the suffering accepted by this Servant is not His own and does not come from His own sin. He does not accept it just for another person. "The Lord made the punishment fall on him, the punishment *all of us* deserved" (Isaiah 53:6, TEV; italics given).

The answer to the question "Why?" is Isaiah's testing truth. The testing truth is: Because of God's love, His Messiah would choose to suffer. But why? Isaiah drives his point home to complete the unthinkable truth: The Messiah would

choose to suffer in order to reach unreachable (lost) people. And we are the unreachable people! Unreachable people are those who do not understand the Servant as "struck down by God" (Isaiah 53:4). Job's friends thought his sins must have caused his suffering. Jesus' disciples asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). In the same way, people who saw Jesus on the cross thought the worst of Jesus. Moses said that "anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deuteronomy 21:23; Numbers 25:4).

But all this was God's will (Isaiah 53:10). Why? Because "Christ [Jesus] redeemed [saved] us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Because God "made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness [holiness] of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV). In a sense, Jesus became sin! He accepted every evil desire and selfish thought of the billions of people who have ever lived. A great flood of sin and suffering came upon Him as if He were evil itself. But He gave Himself to die so that He could wipe out all sin and all of sin's results!

**The weight, the guilt, the punishment for all the sins of the whole world fell upon Jesus at the Cross. The only way we could be saved was for Jesus to die. What does Jesus having to die tell us about how bad sin is? What does Jesus having to die tell us about God's love for us?**



THURSDAY—JUNE 3

**A TRANSFORMING<sup>9</sup> OFFERING  
(Isaiah 53:10).**

**What does it mean that the Servant's life is "an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10)?**

The Hebrew word for "offering" means a "guilt/reparation [payment] offering" (Leviticus 5:14–6:7; Leviticus 7:1-7). This offering could cover for wrongs done against other people (Leviticus 6:2, 3). Such sins were named by Isaiah (Isaiah 1–3; Isaiah 10:1, 2; Isaiah 58). Also, the sinner must restore (return) to the wronged person that which was taken, plus pay a penalty. This needs to be done before he offers the sacrifice to receive forgiveness from God (Leviticus 6:4-7; compare Matthew 5:23, 24). In a case of

the wrong use of something that belongs to God, the payment goes to Him (Leviticus 5:16). Now we can understand Isaiah 40:2, where God comforts His imprisoned people in Babylon by telling them they have paid enough for their sins.

But following the payment, there must be a sacrifice. The sacrifice is in Isaiah 53. The sacrifice is God's Servant. The Servant is led like a sheep to be sacrificed (killed) (Isaiah 53:7) for people who have sinned (Isaiah 53:6).

The Servant was "cut off from the land of the living" (Isaiah 53:8; compare Daniel 9:26). He was fully burned in the sacrifice that feeds the flame of hope for us. But the Servant comes forth from death to receive honor and glory to see His "offspring [saved children]" and to prolong (lengthen) His days (Isaiah 53:10-12).

**How do the following verses show the same basic message as Isaiah 53?**

Hebrews 2:9 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 3:9-11 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Galatians 2:16, 20, 21 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 32:1, 2 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>9</sup>transforming—the ability to make a complete change in something or someone. Jesus' sacrifice (offering) on the cross has the ability to completely change us.

1 Peter 2:24 \_\_\_\_\_

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Romans 5:8 \_\_\_\_\_

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**If someone were to ask you to summarize the good news of Isaiah 52:13–53:12, what would you say?**

### FRIDAY—JUNE 4

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “What a price has been paid for us! Behold (look at) the cross, and the sacrifice uplifted upon it. Look at His hands, with holes from the cruel nails. Look at His feet, nailed with spikes (larger nails) to the tree. Jesus accepted our sins in His own body. That suffering, that pain, is the price of your salvation.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 172.

“Jesus accepted our sins in His own body on the cross. . . . What must sin be, if no limited human could pay for sin? What must sin’s curse be if God alone could remove sin? The cross of Jesus announces to every person that the penalty of sin is death. . . . Oh, there must be some strong evil power preventing people from accepting the Holy Spirit’s invitations to believe in Jesus.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 44.

“The law of God’s government was to be made clear by the death of God’s only Son. Jesus accepted the guilt of the sins of

the world. Our salvation depends only on Jesus becoming human and His death as the Son of God. He could suffer, because He was God. He could win, because He was without any stain of disloyalty or sin. Jesus became victorious for our sake when He accepted the justice of punishment. He made eternal<sup>10</sup> life sure for us while He glorified the law, and made it honorable.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 302.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Isaiah 53:7-9 talks about the Servant’s death and burial. How much of these verses were fulfilled at the end of Jesus’ life? Matthew 26:57–27:60; Mark 14:53–15:46; Luke 22:54–23:53; John 18:12–19:42.
2. Look at the last quote above by Ellen White. What does she mean that Jesus’ death made the law clear to us? How do we understand His death as proof that the law is eternal and cannot be changed? What are the two great principles of the law? Mark 12:29-31; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18. How did Jesus show these principles in His life? How are we to show them in our lives?

**SUMMARY:** Isaiah tells us who God’s Servant is. Isaiah also tells us about the Servant’s birth and work. He finally reveals the sad event<sup>11</sup> that gives us hope from sin. To reach, save, and heal lost people (including us), God’s Servant volunteers to accept our suffering and punishment.

<sup>10</sup>eternal—without beginning or end; lasting forever.

<sup>11</sup>event—thing that happens.