



**Sunday School Lesson for December 18, 2005**  
**Released on December 14, 2005**

**"Hope for Those Who Suffer"**

**Printed Text: Isaiah 53:1-3; Luke 1:47-55**

**Background Scripture: Isaiah 53:1-12; Luke 1:1-80**

**Devotional Reading: Isaiah 52:7-12**

**Isaiah 53:1-3**

**1. Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?**

2. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

**3. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

**Luke 1:46-55**

46. And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

**47. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.**

48. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

**49. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.**

50. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

**51. He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.**

52. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

**53. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.**

54. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

**55. As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.**

### **Today's Aim**

**Facts:** to examine passages from Isaiah and Luke in which the prophet and Mary bear witness to the one source of hope for those in darkness.

**Principle:** to celebrate the hope that the Messiah provides.

**Application:** to remind us that through Christ there is hope for those in darkness.

### **Introduction**

#### **Hope Defined**

*Hope* sometimes has been defined as "confident expectation" or a "union of desire and expectation." By its very nature, the concept of hope is restricted to those who are alive (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

The Christian has the great joy of having a living hope that has been guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That hope looks forward to an incorruptible inheritance that is reserved in Heaven (1 Peter 1:3, 4). That hope sustains the believer, regardless of the trials that may come in this life. That hope serves as an anchor of the soul to everyone who finds refuge in the sure promises of God (Hebrews 6:18, 19).

Hope is a part of that famous trilogy of faith, hope, and charity (love). Each serves an important role in defining the Christian experience.

### **Lesson Background**

Passages from Isaiah and Luke are the texts for this lesson. The first three verses of Isaiah 53 are a part of the fourth servant poem or servant song. (See the discussion of these four in our previous two lessons.) The poem at issue today begins at Isaiah 52:13 and it continues to the end of Isaiah 53. Polycarp, a Christian writer of the second century, refers to Isaiah 53 as "the golden passionnal of the Old Testament." This is the passage that has given rise to the phrase *suffering servant*. A prophetic view of the substitutionary death of the Messiah is clearly shown in the poem.

Isaiah 53 is quoted at least six times in the New Testament. (See Matthew 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32, 33; Romans 10:16; and 1 Peter 2:22.) There are 30 or so other references to it that are not direct quotations. What an important passage this is!

The Gospel of Luke, for its part, gives careful attention to the birth of Jesus, which occurs some 700 years after Isaiah writes. The occasion of the passage from Luke for today's lesson is Mary's visit to Elisabeth, a relative. Elisabeth was with child herself, and that child would come to be known as John the Baptist. Mary's response to Elisabeth's blessing is sometimes called The Magnificat, following the Latin translation.

### **The Humble Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:1-3)**

#### **1. What was so hard to believe about Isaiah's report? (v.1)**

Isaiah reports on a great figure called the Servant, whom we now know to be the Messiah. According to the prophet, this Servant is ordinary in appearance, and he faces rejection. This description of the Servant does not make sense in the human mind.

Israel expected a Messiah who would bring the nation out of bondage and crush their enemies. That nation expected a mighty king instead of a suffering servant. Israel found it very difficult to accept such a Messiah. It was so difficult that they opposed Him.

Living on the other side of Isaiah's prophecy, we can see how Jesus was ordinary, a carpenter from a poor family. We can see how He was rejected. Yet those living before might have wondered about Isaiah's words. Could this be the way God would work?

#### **2. How was Jesus like a tender plant? (v. 2)**

Jesus was to be highly exalted when he died on the cross and rose on the third day (Isa. 52:13); however, He would not start out as a thriving tree in Israel, but as a tender plant. A tender plant, a seedling, is fragile and easily destroyed. King Herod sought to kill Jesus as a infant, but God warned Joseph and had Jesus' family flee to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-18). Jesus needed God's protection to survive in His early years. Had God not given Joseph those precious instructions, Jesus would've been destroyed at Herod's hand.

Not only did Isaiah describe Jesus as a tender plant but also as a root in dry ground. The picture of a plant surviving in a hostile desert is not the picture many would have devised for the great coming Messiah. Yet, Jesus lived in danger of his life on many occasions, and He did live in a sort of spiritual desert. He was the image of life in a land filled with cruelty and hostility.

#### **3. Does Isaiah 53:2 mean that Jesus was physically repulsive? Explain.**

Many have wrongly taken Isaiah's statements about comeliness and beauty to mean that Jesus must have been ugly. Why should anyone care about Jesus' physical appearance while He lived on this earth? Jesus did far too much for humanity for anyone to focus on His physical appearance. People in the Gospels were not repulsed by His appearance, nor were they attracted to Him because of his appearance. The point Isaiah was making was that Jesus was not like what some

might expect--a sort of King Saul, taller and more handsome than any in the land (1 Sam. 9:2). Jesus is not king because of His looks but because of His divine nature and His perfect character.

#### **4. Jesus experienced a lot of rejection. Which was the worst? (v. 3)**

Verse 3 seems to describe Jesus' life perfectly. He lived a life full of rejection. On the night before His death, He cried great tears and sweated so much it was like blood falling on the ground (Luke 22:44). Jesus was not a distant superstar who died for the sins of the world. He knew rejection and pain from firsthand experience and died regardless.

His own brothers rejected Him (John 7:5) as did his hometown (Luke 4:16-30). He was attacked and even mocked by religious leaders, though he responded with wise words and exposed the leaders for their errors. Jesus was the most loving and worthy man who ever lived, yet He was the most abused person in human history.

Now if all that rejection wasn't enough, Jesus had to go through the greatest rejection in eternity. He had to face the rejection of His own Father. Jesus bore our sins (Isa 53:5), and God punished Him for **our** wrongdoings. This rejection was the one that really hurt Jesus the most and led him to cry out, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

Now Jesus didn't have to face all this rejection, but He chose to endure all of it for humanity. If any of us would've been in Jesus' shoes, we would've given up and abandoned humanity. But thank God for Jesus. He endured it till the end, and we should be very appreciative of it. Jesus endured God's judgment in our place. He didn't have to do it, but He loved us so much that He did it anyway. Sadly, a lot of people will reject Jesus' sacrifice and end up facing God's punishment in eternity. Let's reach out to our communities and the world to spread the Good News so that they can receive salvation instead of condemnation.

#### **The God Who Raises the Humble (Luke 1:47-55)**

#### **5. How do we know that Joseph and Mary were poor?**

If the world was surprised to find that God's promises were fulfilled through an ordinary and even a rejected man, Mary was surprised to hear that God chose her to bear His Messiah.

At the time of her purification, Mary brought a pair of turtledoves (Luke 2:24), an offering indicative of the poor (Lev. 12:8). Even though Mary and Joseph were descendants of David, that royal line did not bring prestige or wealth in their day.

#### **6. How did God show His might in working with Mary? (v. 49)**

When people think of God's might, many think of earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, or other types of natural disasters. Some might even think about God curing an incurable disease. While those acts demonstrate God's might, His greatest

miracle of all time came in the conception of the Messiah through Mary, a poor Israelite woman. And He did it **without a man**.

In verse 35 the angel explained that "the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee." God was doing what no other human being could ever do, causing His divine Son to be conceived as a human child. The virgin birth was rather quiet and behind the scenes, but Mary was right to say, "He that is mighty hath done to me great things."

## **7. Why does God tend to use the unknown and weak instead of the strong and acclaimed for His great acts? (v. 51-53)**

It would seem to make sense that God would want to use the strong and acclaimed for His great acts. Those people seem to be the most qualified to be used by God. However, many people that are strong and acclaimed tend to glorify themselves instead of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:25-39). They will take credit for God's miracles. God will not share His glory with anyone (Isa 42:8), He must have **all** the glory.

God often deliberately works through the poor and unknown people rather than the great and acclaimed. Mary understood this well. In *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren, he states that God's strength is shown through a person's weakness (cf. 1 Cor. 12:9). A person who is weak can only rely on God for strength. When God does a great work in a weak person's life, the weak person know that God **and only God** that did the work. Those that are weak will give God the praise and glory that He deserves. As Warren also stated in his book, people don't know that God is all they need until God is all they got. No wonder God gets so much glory through the weak and humble.

## **8. How is Hannah's prayer from 1 Samuel 2 similar to Mary's psalm of praise?**

In Hannah's prayer, she also praised God for choosing to use the weak and demonstrating His power. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among the princes" (v. 8).

Hannah was the barren wife taunted by her husband's other wife. Hannah was a woman looked down on by her culture because of her childlessness. Yet it was through Hannah's prayers and her fear of God that a special child was born to her--Samuel the prophet. Samuel, in turn, was the one used to anoint David and start the line of Messiah.

Now Mary was at the end of the chain of God's great work to bring Messiah into the world. She was like a hungry one whom God filled with good things. She was a poor maiden in Israel, but she was used by God in a way more powerful than anyone would ever have thought.

## **9. What did God's work in Mary's life have to do with Israel? (v. 54-55)**

Mary knew the scriptures. She recognized that the events in her life were part of a much bigger picture. God promised Israel a time of restoration for many centuries. Israel is God's chosen people ever since the time of Abraham.

God foretold that Israel would fall away from Him and yet be restored at the end of days (Deut. 4:25-31, 30:1-6). In many places in the Prophets, God told Israel that after He sent the nation into exile, He would restore them at the end of days. The key figure in God's plan is the Messiah Jesus.

Mary understood that her place was to bring the One who would fulfill God's promise into the world. Mary was the mother of the Savior of Israel. Mary recognized that God acted out of His great love for Israel and His covenant faithfulness to Abraham.

## **10. How do we get in position to be used by God for His work?**

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be used by God. As Christians we should have a desire to do some kind of work in ministry. In any ministry, it is important to remember that we must trust God and not our strength, glory, and acclaim. God does not need those things to work in us. No matter what strengths or weakness a person has, that person can be used by God if and only if he or she trusts him completely.

We can't impress God with our achievements. Wealth is not necessary in order for God to use us. All we need is faith. Faith is what pleases God, and faith is what's needed in order to be effective in ministry. We can't please God without it (Heb 11:6).

God is going to redeem this world with His power, and not ours. When He sent the Servant, the Messiah, He sent Him as a man we would not have picked out of a crowd. When He chose a woman to bear Messiah, He picked a poor maiden we would not have thought suitable.

When we think that we can't be used by God, we should remember Mary's words. Mary, the poor and unknown maiden said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). God has a purpose for all of us, and He will reveal it to us if we seek Him in prayer.

## **Conclusion**

Some have a different hope at Christmas: they simply hope to be able to have a meal for the day. Some groups sponsor such meals for the needy in their communities. Churches often have benevolent programs that include delivering baskets of food to the underprivileged. Yes, there are some who take advantage of such kind acts, but there are others who express their sincere appreciation for these labors of love in the name of Christ. Such experiences in helping others to have their physical hopes fulfilled make the efforts worthwhile.

God has done so much for us. What will you do to provide hope for those who suffer physically and spiritually at this time of year?

## **Prayer**

Our Father in Heaven, we read daily of suffering in the world, and that Christians are often the targets for persecution. We pray for them and for us that we may be steadfast because of the hope that we have in Christ, the hope of the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

## **Thought to Remember**

"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Romans 15:13).

## **Anticipating Next Week's Lesson**

Read Isaiah 6:1-3 and Luke 2:8-20 as you prepare to study the events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ.

## **Lesson Summarized By**

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