

THE ENIGMA OF JESUS CHRIST – ISAIAH 52:13-15

A. Introduction.

1. Outline.
 - a. The Enigma of Jesus Christ, Isaiah 52:13-15.
 - b. The Humiliation of Jesus Christ, Isaiah 53:1-2.
 - c. The Despising of Jesus Christ, Isaiah 53:3.
 - d. The Exaltation of Jesus Christ, Isaiah 53:4-12.
2. The prophet Isaiah was a Jerusalem aristocrat of around 700 B.C. who the Jews regarded as equal to Moses. Highly educated having great literary skills, he was an artist with words, using a greater vocabulary than any other of the prophets. The source of his greatness was his relationship to Jehovah. In 6:1-13, his encounter with “the Holy One of Israel” 6:1-4, leads to his confession of sin, 6:5, his cleansing, 6:6-7, and his commissioning, 6:8-13.
3. Isaiah is more often quoted in the New Testament than all other Old Testament prophets combined. However in chs. 52-53 is to be found the jewel in the casket, the “Fifth Gospel,” the most sublime, the most exalted prophecy in all of the Bible, obviously because of its revelation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the enigma arose in the minds of the Jews who, such as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, declared, “we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel, . . . (we know he died, but some) said that He was alive,” Luke 24:21-23.
4. By definition, an “enigma” is a paradox, a seeming puzzle, though not a contradiction. With regard to who Jesus Christ is in truth, there is no paradox. But the perception by the world at large is different. Consider some of the examples of the Gospels:
 - a. Guests at Simon the Pharisee’s home, being perplexed, declared “Who is this man who even forgives sins?” Luke 7:49.
 - b. The disciples arouse Jesus sleeping in their storm tossed boat and declare, “even the winds and the sea obey him, Matt. 8:25-27.
 - c. Pilate asks, “Are you a king? (coming as a carpenter from Nazareth)” John 18:37.
 - d. The Jews contemptuously exclaimed, “You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God,” John 10:33.

- e. Who is this man who is exalted on Palm Sunday with shouts of “Hosanna” and yet is crucified on Good Friday?

B. The paradox according to Isaiah 52:13-15.

The common expectation of the Jews was expressed by those Emmaus Road disciples when they expressed their hope that, “we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel,” Luke 24:21. In other words, the longing was for deliverance from Roman captivity, and the repetition of past historic woes.

However, in this perspective there was one major element that was virtually ignored, namely the requirement that only a holy people could live with the holy Messiah of God. Implicit here is the need for atonement and cleansing, while the Jews in general did not see the need of such radical salvation.

Hence, here is the root of the problem when men and women, not only in the days of the Lord Jesus, but also today, see his earthly ministry to be an enigma, a puzzle. When rightly understood, in terms of who he is and what he has done, there is *necessity* of atonement, not so much enigma. So Isaiah summarizes in these three introductory verses.

1. The great exaltation of Jesus Christ, v. 13.

Here is a “flash-back” movie situation. We start with the end of the gospel story, resurrection, glorification, and then wind back to how this glorious climax came about.

- a. The prosperity of the Lord Jesus Christ, v13a.

He will “have success” regarding what he set out to accomplish, Jer.23:5; he will greatly advance the saving will of the Father; John 17:4.

- b. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, v. 13b.

His humiliation will culminate in very great elevation, above all rulers and authorities, Col. 2:10; Phil. 2:5-8, 9-11.

2. The great humiliation of Jesus Christ, v. 14.

Here we go back to Jesus Christ’s humiliation, the ugliness of it all, the representation of sin’s hideousness, the seeming enigma of suffering Deity!

- a. The shock of *his* appearing, v. 14a.

Suddenly we are plunged into an appalling scene of grossly defiled purity, so much so that he could not be recognized as a man!

- b. The shock of *my* appearing, v. 14b.

Yet the revelation of 53:3-4 leads us to understand that the repulsiveness here is in fact God's perception of our sin which Jesus Christ bore, as leprosy.

- 3. The great accomplishment of Jesus Christ, v. 15.

Here we return to the triumph and fruit of Christ's humiliation, the achievement which could come about by no other way.

- a. Here is the wonder of the gospel, the fact of man's foulest deeds yet being turned around into a cleansing stream, v. 15a.

- (1) God alone can make man's bitter waters sweet.

- (2) God alone can take the opposition of a Pharaoh and turn it into the redemption of His people.

- (3) God alone can make the wrath of man to praise Him, Ps. 76: 10.

- (4) God alone can turn horror into adoring wonder.

- b. There will come about a great Gentile ingathering, v. 15b.

New understanding will break forth; Kings will be struck dumb with speechless wonder at the saving grace of God. Out of grief comes glory; out of judgment comes grace; out of humiliation comes exaltation. What man meant for evil, God has marvelously turned to good. Enigma gives way to sight for the blind.

C. Conclusion.

- 1. The enigma of Jesus Christ is resolved when we know who we are.

Matt. 4:16 quotes Isa. 9:2 as follows. "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a Great Light." We must know our darkness, as if in a fearful tunnel; then we longingly appreciate light appearing at the end

- 2. The enigma of Jesus Christ is resolved when we know who he is, "Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14), God savingly with us.
- 3. The enigma of Jesus Christ is resolved when we know what he has done, that is "born my sin in His body on the tree" (I Pet. 2:24).
- 4. The enigma of Jesus Christ is resolved when, knowing who we are, we bow before him and confess, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28) and my Savior.