

# GOOD NEWS

## Acts 8:26-35

Millions worldwide pause every Easter to commemorate Jesus' death and resurrection. They celebrate the gruesome murder of an innocent man because they understand his death offers a love-motivated sacrifice on their behalf, granting them release from a debt they could never pay. Good reasons support that perception of Jesus' death as a celebratory event. For example, Luke uses the phrase "good news" at Jesus' birth to describe the salvation he would provide (*Luke 2:8-12*). The idea of "good news" about a savior connects to Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Even though Isaiah 52:13-53:12 discusses the "good news" of God's then-future rescue of the Jewish people from their captivity to Babylon, repeated uses of the passage in the New Testament reveal that its authors understood the text to refer to Jesus (*cf. Matthew 8:14-17; Luke 22:35-38; John 12:36-38; Acts 8:26-35; 1 Peter 2:19-24*). Their presentation of Isaiah 52-53 has led to the passage becoming a key text in understanding Jesus' death and resurrection. So, to help us deepen our appreciation of Jesus' death and resurrection, we will read Isaiah 52:7-53:12, consider the context within which it was written, and explore the applications it offers us.

### "Awake, awake"<sup>1</sup>

#### *Isaiah 51:9-52:6*

Isaiah worked as God's prophet in Israel during the 8th century BC, approximately three centuries after the inauguration of Israel's monarchy. While God intended Israel's kings to serve as His image-bearers in the nation, representing His sovereignty and will through their rule, most of the Jewish kings rejected God to pursue their selfish will. Consequently, God announced escalating punishments against the Jewish kings and the people who followed their example. Isaiah operated near the beginning of a line of prophets who delivered God's messages to the people, warning them of coming punishment and pleading with them to change their ways. Isaiah announced waves of punishment – a captivity to Assyria (*cf. Isaiah 1-39*) and a more severe captivity to Babylon (*cf. Isaiah 40-66*). While the second half of his message announced the Jewish people's future exile to Babylon, it also prominently featured promises of future redemption.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 sits in the middle of Isaiah's promises of future redemption and poetically describes a conversation between Israel and God. In an implicit critique, some of the Jews called on God to "awake, awake, put on strength" and rescue them as He did during the exodus (*Isaiah 51:9-11*). God responded by twice telling Judah that they needed to 'wake up' and pay attention to what He intended to do (*Isaiah 51:17-52:6*).

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



## "Good news"

### *Isaiah 52:7-12*

God told the Jewish people to prepare themselves because He would deliver "good news" (*Isaiah 52:7-12*). The "good news" Isaiah announced focused on two things: the revelation of God's unique sovereignty (*Isaiah 52:7*) and the return of God's presence into the midst of His people (*Isaiah 52:8*; cf. *Ezekiel 8-10*). However, God would not return empty-handed – Isaiah announced that God would return by leading a procession of exiles as He did in the exodus (*Isaiah 52:11-12*).

## "My servant"

### *Isaiah 52:13-53:12*

Although God repeatedly announced His intention to rescue Judah from captivity, the nation's sin problem remained. *Isaiah 52:13-53:12* describes the unexpected way God planned to resolve the nation's guilt. First, rather than returning Himself, God sent a servant commissioned to rule in His place (*Isaiah 52:7-8, 13*). Second, God announced that He would use the servant to redeem His people from their sin by allowing the servant to be martyred and using his death as "an offering for guilt" for both the Jews and "many nations" (*Isaiah 53:10-12; 52:15*).

## Applications

Given the New Testament's application of *Isaiah 52:9-53:12* to Jesus, consider the following:

- Isaiah reminds us that God's purposes have always revolved around Jesus. Similarly, our lives should revolve around Jesus (cf. *Colossians 3:1-2, 17*).
- Revolving one's life around Jesus involves prioritizing Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' cross offers several crucial reminders.
  - We desperately need rescue, not from the oppression of a powerful foreign nation, but from sin's tyrannical rule over our lives (cf. *John 8:34; Romans 3:9-18, 23*).
  - We need rescue because, like Israel, we have rejected God's good will to pursue our selfish interests (cf. *Romans 3:9-18, 23; James 3:16*).
  - Our rejection demands a costly rescue – it requires the violent death of God's innocent servant Jesus on our behalf.
  - *Isaiah 52-53* offers an encouraging reminder – **God willingly accepts the cost of rescuing us.**

People around the world celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection every year. Rather than celebrating a day, we chose to celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection by submitting our lives to his control. We celebrate Jesus by submitting our will to our merciful and loving God, who sent Jesus to sacrifice himself for us.

