

Can Smart People Believe in God?

In this third (and final) week, we look at two ways that we learn about God: general revelation (by seeing the work of God in creation) and special revelation (through the communication of God's message). Psalm 19 is a classic text, which reminds us that God speaks to us and demonstrates his glory to us, through creation. Yet, it also speaks of the benefit of the law in telling us how God wants us to live. If God reveals himself to us and makes his Word available to us, we are foolish to ignore this revelation. Similarly, in Ps 8, we are told that, by looking at the magnitude and majesty of creation, we should recognise our own 'smallness' by comparison. We are not the centre of the universe; we are made to worship the creator.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ² Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. ³ They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. ⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (Ps 19:1-4)

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? (Ps 8:3-4)

GETTING STARTED: Roger used a quote by philosopher, Damon Young, who is a critic of religion and of those who have religious beliefs. Following is a different quote, where he dismisses that there is any rationale or meaning or being, behind the universe. He criticises any attempt to mesh how we perceive the universe, with meaning or reality. How does his view compare with the verses (above) from Ps 19 and Ps 8?

"Lastly, you ask 'why' of the universe. There is no one 'why'. It is not a clock designed for one purpose, it is a sandbox designed for many. So go play. Toy with semblance, cobble together reality – only try not to muddle the two."¹

READ: ROMANS 1:16-20

🗨️ What did you notice/ what things stood out, as you just read the passage?

🗨️ What things did you take away from the sermon this week?

⚠️ This week, we stare down the road to Easter – and face the harsh reality that we will all die. Life is short. We are finite. Over the weekend, I helped with the clean-up at the home of a work colleague, whose home had been inundated by flood water and mud. After the water receded, the gyprock dropped from the ceiling and the island bench in their kitchen was upended. We watched an army RFS volunteers ferry many of their water-damaged goods onto the back of semi-trailer, bound for the tip. In the space of a number of hours, physical goods and spaces lost their value. No matter how much we hang onto the 'physical' stuff, it does not provide a tangible anchor for our lives.

🗨️ Roger talked about faith being a foundation, which helps us keep steadfast and to stand firm. (Hab 2:4, Heb 10:32-38) It helps us live confidently and to endure. What is one time when your life was rocked by hard circumstances? In what way did your faith help you through that season?

🗨️ Read 2 Cor 11:23-29. What do you learn about the hardships that the apostle Paul endured? Which ones shock you? Which ones would you want to avoid most? When you read the whole catalogue of persecutions like this – what picture do you get of Paul and how committed he was to gospel ministry?

⚠️ In Rom 1:18, Paul puts his gospel ministry in the context of 'the wrath of God'. Through the book of Romans, Paul makes a case that, as humans, we are sinful and that nothing we do, can make us right with God. Even our best tries, are, at best, like "dirty rags" and, at worst, are "ungodliness and wickedness". The gospel "is God's powerful means of bringing salvation. Salvation implies escape, safety, preservation, soundness, healing and deliverance from the consequences of sin, chief of which is death (Gen 2:17)."²

🗨️ If we are confronted by someone we have hurt, we might justify our actions, refuse to acknowledge any wrong or choose to apologise. How do you respond in this sort of situation? Why is acknowledging and confessing our sin, the first step in getting right with God?

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-06-01/young-the-word-of-small-g-god/4045558>

² Stern, D. (1992) Jewish New Testament Commentary. (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications), p329.

☞ Read 1 John 1:5-10 and Ps 51:6. What do these verses say, about people who claim to be without sin? What does the verse in Ps 51 say about what God requires of us? How does repentance move us from just having 'knowledge' about God to having a 'saving faith' in God?

❗ Read Rom 1:19-23. This passage talks about people having evidence of the existence of God, but rejecting that and claiming to be wise. FF Bruce comments:

"The culpable character of men and women's ignorance of God is emphasized still more here: it is a deliberate ignorance. They had the knowledge of God available to them but 'did not see fit to acknowledge God' (verse 28). The truth was accessible to them, but they suppressed it unrighteously and embraced the 'lie' in preference to it."³

☞ There are many people who have more education or who may have a stronger ability to argue or philosophise. How do you feel, when you hear or read people in the media challenging the claims of Christian faith – or ridiculing people of faith? In what way do these verses provide assurance that faith is not 'irrational'?

❗ Roger talked about the gospel – the message of salvation – being powerful, in and of itself. It is not reliant on us being powerful or confident speakers. We are commissioned to take this message into all the world (Matt 28:18-20). To those who believe and have faith in Christ, is revealed the righteousness of God. It is easy to think that this is a message that is "weak" or that we might be seen as weak or gullible, for not only believing, but also for sharing this message. By contrast, Paul wrote that he was not ashamed or embarrassed about this message. The message wasn't about him, but about the saving work that Jesus had done and continues to do in the lives of people.

☞ Many of us find it hard to share our faith or may be fearful about engaging in faith conversations. How confident do you feel about talking about God, Jesus and the Bible? What impediments do you face? Eg is it that you don't know enough about faith or the Bible? do you feel intimidated by others? Are there rules in your workplace that mean you are not allowed to proselytise others?

EASTER REFLECTION: On the next two pages, I have included the text of Isaiah 53, from the *Passion Translation*. This also includes the footnotes found on *Bible Gateway*. Is 53:1 asks two questions:

- Who has truly believed our revelation / (message)?
- To whom will Yahweh reveal his mighty arm? (ie the victory that he has won)

If you are meeting together this week, take the time to read through this passage and reflect on:

- What this passage tells us about the enormity of our sin;
- What this passage tells us about the enormity of the sacrifice and cost, for us to be saved from our sin; and
- The enormity of the rejection that Jesus bore, as he lived his life on earth and went to the cross.

Then look at Is 53:11 – and think about what motivated the suffering servant:

¹¹After the great anguish of his soul, he will see light^[z] and be fully satisfied.^[aa]

By knowing him,^[ab] the righteous one, my servant will make many to be righteous,^[ac] because he, *their sin-bearer*, carried away their sins^[ad]

Then revisit the two questions in Is 53:1 -

- Who has truly believed our revelation / (message)?
- To whom will Yahweh reveal his mighty arm? (ie the victory that he has won)

And reflect again on the words of Rom 1:16-17 [NLT]

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes - the Jew first and also the Gentile.^[g] ¹⁷This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

Ask yourself:

- Am I ashamed or embarrassed about the gospel and speaking out this message?
- Do I really believe it has power to save people and make people right with God?
- What am I going to do about it?

³ Bruce, F. F. (1985). *Romans: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 6, p. 89). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p89.

Isaiah 53

The Passion Translation

53 Who has truly believed our revelation? To whom will Yahweh reveal his mighty arm?^[a]

² He sprouted up like a tender plant before the Lord,^[b] like a root^[c] in parched soil.

He possessed no distinguishing beauty or outward splendor to catch our attention—
nothing special in his appearance to make us desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of *deep* sorrows
who was no stranger to suffering and grief.^[d]

We hid our faces from him in disgust and considered him a nobody, not worthy of respect.

The Sin-Bearer Servant

⁴ Yet he was the one who carried our sicknesses^[e] and endured the torment of our sufferings.

We viewed him as one who was being punished^[f] for something he himself had done,
as one who was struck down by God and brought low.

⁵ But it was because of our rebellious deeds that he was pierced^[g]
and because of our sins that he was crushed.

He endured the punishment that made us completely whole,^[h]
and in^[i] his wounding^[j] we found our healing.

⁶ Like wayward sheep, we have all wandered^[k] astray.

Each of us has turned from God's paths and chosen our own way;
even so, Yahweh laid^[l] the guilt of our every sin upon him.^[m]

The Surrendered Servant

⁷ He was oppressed and harshly mistreated; still he humbly submitted, refusing to defend himself.

He was brought like a *gentle* lamb^[n] to be slaughtered.

Like a silent sheep before his shearers, he didn't even open his mouth.^[o]

⁸ By coercion and with a perversion of justice he was taken away.

And who could have imagined his future?^[p] He was cut down in the prime of life;^[q]
for the rebellion of his^[r] own people, he was struck down *in their place*.

⁹ They gave him a grave among criminals,^[s]

but he ended up instead in a rich man's tomb,^[t]
although he had done no violence nor spoken deceitfully.

The Servant's Reward

¹⁰ Even though it pleased Yahweh to crush him with grief,^[u] he will be restored to favor.^[v]

After his soul becomes a guilt-offering,^[w]

he will gaze upon his many offspring and prolong his days.^[x]

And through him, Yahweh's deepest desires will be fully accomplished.^[y]

¹¹ After the great anguish of his soul, he will see light^[z] and be fully satisfied.^[aa]

By knowing him,^[ab] the righteous one, my servant will make many to be righteous,^[ac]
because he, *their sin-bearer*, carried away their sins^[ad]

¹² So I, *Yahweh*, will assign him a portion among a great multitude,

and he will triumph and divide the spoils of victory with *his* mighty ones—^[ae]
all because he poured out his life-blood^[af] to death.

He was counted among the worst of sinners, yet he carried sin's burden for many^[ag]
and intercedes for those who are rebels.^[ah]

Footnotes

- [Isaiah 53:1](#) God's *arm* is a metaphor for his triumphant power. It is said that almost every verse in this chapter is alluded to in the New Testament in reference to Jesus.
- [Isaiah 53:2](#) Or "before him."
- [Isaiah 53:2](#) Jesus is the Root of David and the Sprouting of the Lord (Isa. [11:1](#)). The parched soil can represent both the barrenness of humanity before God and the barren season of Israel's history when Jesus appeared. A root cannot live in dry ground, yet we see a hint here that the Messiah would be miraculously born. A root in dry ground is an allusion to the virgin birth of Jesus, who was conceived without a human father.
- [Isaiah 53:3](#) Yet Jesus was the most emotionally whole and healed man to ever walk the earth. He did not absorb the insults and rejections of even his own neighbours (Luke [4:14-30](#)).
- [Isaiah 53:4](#) This was fulfilled in two ways. First, when the Lamb of God carried away diseases as he walked the earth (Matt. [8:16-17](#)). And second, by paying the sin price of all humanity on the cross with his sacred blood.
- [Isaiah 53:4](#) Or "stricken," a word used for one who is struck with leprosy. Because of this, the Jewish Talmud gives many opinions about this verse, then offers an authoritative ruling of the sages. "The rabbis say: 'His name is The Leper ... as it is said [in Isaiah [53:4](#)], 'Surely our sicknesses he himself bore and our sorrows he carried, yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted'" (b. Sanhedrin 98b). Their

conclusion was that the Messiah will be called “the Leper of the House of Rabbi.” They understood that he would not be an actual “leper” but that he would carry the “spiritual leprosy” of the people, as a leper carries his affliction.

- g. [Isaiah 53:5](#) See Zech. [12:10](#); John [19:31-37](#); Rev. [1:7](#).
- h. [Isaiah 53:5](#) This is the Hebrew word *shalom*, meaning “peace, prosperity, wholeness, success, well-being.” All of these have come to us through Christ’s sufferings.
- i. [Isaiah 53:5](#) The Hebrew word could be translated “among his wounds (bruises)” or “in his wounds (bruises).” See the split-open rock of Song. [2:14](#).
- j. [Isaiah 53:5](#) The Hebrew word for *wounding* (“scourging”) is *chaburah* and means “blueness of the wounds.” But *chaburah* is taken from the root word *chabar*, which means “to join together, to unite, to have fellowship, to become a couple.” A nuanced translation of [Isaiah 53:5](#) could be “In the fellowship of being one with him is our healing.”
- k. [Isaiah 53:6](#) The Hebrew verb wander has an implication of self-deception. See 1 Peter [2:25](#).
- l. [Isaiah 53:6](#) The Hebrew verb laid can also mean “to make intercession.” This would mean that the Lord interceded within himself (the Godhead) to orchestrate our salvation.
- m. [Isaiah 53:6](#) This entire chapter provides such detail of the last hours of Jesus Christ that one would almost imagine Isaiah was standing at the foot of the cross writing this chapter. Isaiah’s prophecy, written more than seven hundred years before the cross, is all stated in the past tense, as though it had already happened. There is no other person in human history who could possibly fulfill all of Isaiah’s prophecy. It is believed that [Isaiah 53](#) is referred to eighty-five times in the New Testament. A few of these references include Matt. [8:17](#); [27:11-13](#), [26-31](#), [41-43](#), [57-60](#); Mark [15:28](#); Luke [22:37](#); John [12:38](#); Acts [8:32-35](#); Rom. [5:6-9](#), [18-19](#); [10:16](#); Phil. [2:5-11](#); 1 Peter [2:21-24](#).
- n. [Isaiah 53:7](#) See Gen. [22:7-8](#); John [1:29](#); 1 Cor. [5:7](#); 1 Peter [1:18-19](#); Rev. [5:12](#).
- o. [Isaiah 53:7](#) This was the silence of submission to his Father’s will. See Matt. [26:63](#); Luke [23:9](#); 1 Peter [2:23](#).
- p. [Isaiah 53:8](#) Or “who of his generation considered.”
- q. [Isaiah 53:8](#) Or “He was cut off from the land of the living.” See Dan. [9:26](#).
- r. [Isaiah 53:8](#) Or “my.”
- s. [Isaiah 53:9](#) See Matt. [27:38](#); Mark [15:27](#); Luke [23:32](#); John [19:18](#).
- t. [Isaiah 53:9](#) See Matt. [27:57-60](#). The literal Hebrew is “and with the rich in his deaths (plural).” His death is our death too, for we have been co-crucified with Christ (Gal. [2:20](#)). Jesus was born from a virgin womb and laid in a virgin tomb.
- u. [Isaiah 53:10](#) Or “disease.”
- v. [Isaiah 53:10](#) This points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to the place of highest honor (Phil. [2:5-10](#)).
- w. [Isaiah 53:10](#) See Mark [10:45](#); Eph. [5:2](#); Heb. [9:14](#).
- x. [Isaiah 53:10](#) Christ’s sacrifice results in the birth of spiritual offspring. He will see his spiritual offspring and enjoy living his life through them; thus, it could be said he prolonged his days. The life we live is no longer our own, and in a way, we prolong his days as we walk in close fellowship with Christ. A people in his image is the joy that was set before him (Heb. [12:1-2](#)).
- y. [Isaiah 53:10](#) Or “the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.”
- z. [Isaiah 53:11](#) This vision of light is the light of a new day, the resurrection morning light that flooded into the empty tomb.
- aa. [Isaiah 53:11](#) Or “He will eat and drink his fill.” See Song. [5:1](#).
- bb. [Isaiah 53:11](#) Or “by his knowledge” or “by his sweat.” The Hebrew word knowledge is taken from a homonymic root for “sweat.” Perhaps this is an allusion to his sweat trickling from the cross or of the sweat of blood in the garden of Gethsemane, as well as the knowledge of life that comes to us when we believe in him. See also Gen. [2:9](#) and [3:17-19](#), which also connect knowledge (of good and evil) with Adam’s sweat.
- cc. [Isaiah 53:11](#) This is an intimate knowledge, or experience of him by faith, that imparts the righteousness of God to everyone who believes. To be declared righteous involves pardon and acceptance. We are fully pardoned and fully accepted in Christ. See Rom. [3:22-26](#), [8:1](#); 2 Cor. [5:21](#); Eph. [1:5-6](#); 1 John [4:10](#).
- dd. [Isaiah 53:11](#) Jesus accepted the responsibility for the consequences of our sins. See Ps. [38:4](#); John [1:29](#); 1 John [3:5](#).
- ee. [Isaiah 53:12](#) Jesus shares the spoils of his victory on the cross and resurrection with us, his mighty ones. He purchased your victory, your salvation, your emotional wholeness, your healing, your deliverance, and your triumph over every foe.
- ff. [Isaiah 53:12](#) Or “himself.”
- gg. [Isaiah 53:12](#) See Matt. [11:28](#).
- hh. [Isaiah 53:12](#) The work of a priest was to offer sacrifice for sin and intercede for the sinner. Our High Priest, Jesus, has done this for us. He became our sacrifice and now is interceding for us. See Luke [23:33-34](#); Rom. [8:34](#); Heb. [7:25](#), [27](#).⁴

⁴ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah+53&version=TPT>