

KCC, 3-Apr-2022; two weeks before Easter

Face Like Flint  
Isaiah 50; Luke 9

Turn to Isaiah 50. This is a sermon about Jesus, to help us know our Lord. These Scriptures give us a window into a turning point in the Lord's life; they actually tell us what he was thinking.

This is two weeks before Easter, when we remember that our Lord was crucified in Jerusalem, and that he rose the third day. Our Scriptures today tell us how that final journey began. The final journey began by Jesus setting his face like flint to do what God told him to do.

We will begin in Isaiah. In the second half of the book, Isaiah wrote prophecies of Christ, in which Christ was God's Servant. There are five Servant songs in the second half of Isaiah. Our text in Isaiah 50 is the third Servant song. So we will read this Servant song.

This one is written as the Servant explaining himself. The Servant tells us what God has asked him to do and how he thinks about it. It is more explicit than what Jesus said in the Gospels.

The Obedient Humiliated Servant – Isa 50:5-8a

*The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue,  
to know the word that sustains the weary.  
He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.  
The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away.  
I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;  
I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.  
Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced.  
Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.  
He who vindicates me is near.*

We are to imagine Jesus saying this to us: *He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears.*

When Jesus prays, it is as much to listen as to speak. I have tried the kind of listening prayer where I am silent before God and wait for him to say something. That works for some, but not for me. Nothing happens. But often, as I pray, God moves, he nudges me over, he takes my prayer in ways I did not plan. I end up praying something else, and thinking in a different way.

Jesus often went away alone to pray, and these lines make clear that Jesus enters prayer above all as an obedient person. *He wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed, the Lord has opened my ears.*

*I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away.* “Others could choose to disobey,” says the Servant, “but that is not for me. I will not rebel, will not turn away.”

And then we find out what that actually means: *I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.*

The emphasis here is on public shame and humiliation. For the Servant, obedience means offering himself to public shame. He will be treated like a common criminal, he will be mocked. Ever had someone spit on your face? You would remember it.

And the Servant will not be caught or trapped in this, or surprised. No, he will walk into it, he will offer this. He will offer his back, his beard, his face. He will not hide. This is what the Sovereign Lord told him to do, and the Servant did not rebel or turn away.

*Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who shows that I’m right is near.*

We hear Jesus showing to us how he managed to go through with this, and do what God has told him to do. God called him into a shameful place. We in our society are dismayed by the physical pain of being flogged and crucified, and it is truly very great. But here and in the Gospels, the emphasis is not on physical pain, but public shame, mockery, humiliation.

How can Jesus bring himself to endure this? He says the same thing two different ways. *Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. I know I will not be put to shame because he who shows that I’m right is near.*

“This will not end in my disgrace, because God helps me. This will not end in my shame, because the God who lifts me up is near. Therefore, I have set my face like flint.”

Flint is a hard kind of stone that can be chipped so that it has a sharp cutting edge or point. “I have set my face like flint. I have set my face like a hard edge, and I am going to do this.” Sometimes in life we need to do things that we really do not want to do. But they have to be done, and now it is time. So we steel ourselves, we resolve to put one foot in front of the other and get moving and do this. That’s what this paragraph is about.

Jesus set his face like a flint: first, because God told him to do this, offer your back and beard, don’t hide your face, and Jesus was profoundly obedient. And second, he set his face like flint because he knew God would help him, and be near him, and that by God’s doing this could only end very well for him. And even with all that in place, Jesus had to set his face like flint.

Notice that the Servant fears nothing directly from God. The people will treat the Servant terribly, but God will be near and will help him. To be more clear, there is nothing here about God pouring out his righteous wrath on the Servant. Some say that, but it is not in the Bible.

Jesus did pray, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” We know about this. We trust God to be near us and help us, we believe that and it encourages us. But on a dark and horrible day, it is almost impossible to believe. So also for Jesus.

Now, to Luke 9. Luke tells us exactly where in Jesus’s life this happened.

Jesus Set his Face for Jerusalem – Luke 9:51-53

The Greek Testament has the word “face” three times in these verses, once in each verse, and I have adapted the NIV to make that clearer.

*As the time approached for him to be taken up, Jesus resolutely set his **face** for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers before his **face**, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because his **face** was set for Jerusalem.* (NIV, adapted by EN).

Even in Greek, it is awkward to use “face” three times in these lines, but Luke is trying to tell us something. By repeating the word “face,” Luke the writer tells us that this is Jesus fulfilling the Servant prophecy in Isaiah 50, this is Jesus setting his **face** like flint to do what he has to do.

Luke is telling us that Jesus is now at the stage of Isaiah 50. God called Jesus to offer himself to his enemies. We see Jesus choose not to rebel or turn way, but rather to steel himself and to do what God said. He set his face like flint for Jerusalem.

All of Luke 9 is a Turning Point for Jesus

Several important things happen for Jesus in Luke 9. In Luke 9:18, Jesus was praying alone, with his disciples close by, and then he asked them who they thought he was. Peter answered for all of them: “God’s Messiah.”

And as soon as those words were out of Peter’s mouth, Jesus ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone. That is very strongly worded in v21. And immediately after that, Jesus said he *“must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”*

Jesus was giving his disciples a strong message here. Jesus was telling them, “Yes, you know that I am the Christ. But forget everything you are thinking about the Christ. Get rid of them.

This is the one thing you need to know about the Christ: *The Son of Man he must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life.* “That needs to be the center of how you understand the Christ.” That’s what Jesus was telling the twelve.

It didn't work, of course. It did not become the center of their ideas of Christ. But Jesus kept teaching this.

That was what he said to the disciples. And then he said to everyone following him: "If *anyone* wants to follow me, you must prepare yourselves, every day, for the same thing: suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny their right to stay alive, must prepare every day for execution, and then follow me. It is the only way to save your life."

And later in Luke 9, in vv51-53, Jesus began his final trip to Jerusalem, setting his face for Jerusalem. For Jesus, the disciples grasping that he was the Christ was the key, the start. Peter declaring that Jesus was the Christ seems to have been a prompt for him, a cue, a sign.

Once they understood that he was the Christ, Jesus began to act and speak differently. He began to teach them about his suffering and death and resurrection. And then he told them that being his disciple meant preparing for the same thing. And then he began his final trip to Jerusalem.

In Luke, Most of Jesus's Ministry is Still Ahead

Try now to get a feel for the whole Gospel of Luke. The ministry of Jesus did not begin until Luke chapter 4. He was tempted in the wilderness at the beginning of Luke 4. Jesus set his face for Jerusalem at the end of Luke 9, so he's been teaching and healing for six chapters.

Jesus did not arrive in Jerusalem until the end of Luke 19, ten chapters later. And he was arrested in Luke 22. That means that the way Luke tells us the story of Jesus, two thirds of his ministry happened *after* he had set his face to walk into the city of his enemies and offer himself to them. Two thirds of his ministry happened *after* he set his face like a flint in obedience to God.

We don't know actual dates here. How long was that last trip? How many weeks or months was it from the end of Luke 9 until his arrest in Luke 22? We don't know, but a month or two seems a reasonable guess. Just a guess.

The important thing is that we understand that Luke has deliberately put most of the ministry of Jesus into that last trip. Luke wants the flavour of this last journey to Jerusalem, in order to suffer and be rejected, to be killed and to rise, to be our strongest picture of Jesus.

Most of the Jesus we know in Luke is telling himself: "This will not end in my disgrace, because God helps me. This will not end in my shame, because the God who lifts me up is near. He will have the last word. Therefore, I have set my face like a flint." That's Jesus talking to himself every morning.

In Luke 12:50, Jesus said, "I have to be baptized with a baptism, and how pressured I am, how distressed I am, until it is done!" He's thinking about this all the time.

In Luke 9, Jesus set his face for Jerusalem. Ten chapters later, Luke 19, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. Here's how we read it: *After Jesus had said this, he went ahead, going up to Jerusalem.* (Lk 19:28) He went ahead, going up to Jerusalem. We need to picture Jesus walking ahead of the crowd of his followers as they approach. There was no shrinking back from this.

How should we respond to this?

Two things: ONE, does your life feel like this sometimes? You have to set your face like flint, and you have to talk to yourself as he did? It's common enough. Jesus knows about that. You may pour out your heart to him and he will know what you're talking about.

Hebrews has given us a Jesus who was tempted, and who suffered when he was tempted, a Jesus who understands weakness because he himself experienced great weakness and temptation, and had to pray himself through desperate situations, and was faithful only because God heard his prayer and answered. Isaiah 50 and Luke 9 and giving us the same story in different words.

Second, let's thank him for being faithful. Revelation calls Jesus the faithful witness, because he set out for Jerusalem, and did not rebel or turn away. We are saved not by works but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. If he had not been faithful to God, our faith in him would do us no good at all. Our faith in him saves us only because he was faithful.

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, who was faithful to the death, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.... And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen,’ and the elders fell down and worshipped.” (Revelation 5)

PRAYER: O Lord Jesus, with scars on your hands and your feet, you are worthy. You set your face like flint, you obeyed the Father, you endured your baptism. You did not rebel or turn away, you offered yourself. You trusted in God to be near you and help you, and to lift you up, to make it right and more than right at the End. All honour and glory and praise are yours. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.