

His 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. Jesus himself does not say much about how he thought about his life. Few people did in those days. But centuries earlier, Isaiah wrote some incredible lines of prophecy that tell us what Jesus would have said if he had talked about these things.

### 1 Low Christology and High Christology

Low Christology describes those Scriptures that emphasize the human Jesus. When Scriptures teach that he was a lot like us, we say they have a low Christology. When Scriptures talk about his deity, they have high Christology. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* That's high Christology.

Our Isaiah Scripture today has a low Christology. They describe Jesus living as an obedient human, a man that wants to obey God.

Here's the thing, people: we really need them both. Hang on to both. Neither one is more important. The Scriptures that stress the deity of Jesus do not make his humanity any less. The Scriptures that stress his humanity do not make his deity any less. That's why we went over the early creeds in September.

It is a stretch for me to hang onto Christ's deity *and* his humanity. Fully God *and* fully human hardly makes sense. But both are clear in the Bible, so the church has always held tight onto both. We need high Christology and low Christology.

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. So starting today, we are moving toward Easter. We are following Jesus on his last trip to Jerusalem.

In the second half of Isaiah, 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. 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.

### 2 The Obedient and Humiliated Servant – Isa 50:4–9

*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 proves my innocence is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.*

Listen to Jesus tell us about himself: *The Sovereign Lord wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears.*

The NASB uses the word “disciple.” *The Sovereign Lord has given me the tongue of disciples. to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like a disciple.*

Jesus is the ultimate disciple. We are disciples of Jesus. Jesus was a disciple of the Sovereign Lord. Jesus had the tongue, the words, of someone taught by God. He knew the words that would sustain the weary because God taught him, and he learned from God what to say.

We might think, “Jesus was fully God, so of course he knew what to say.” But the Gospels do not talk about Jesus like that. They agree that he was God. He commanded wind and waves to behave, and they immediately obeyed. But in the Gospels, Jesus lived his life as an obedient man, just as we read here in Isaiah 50.

*He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like a disciple.* Every morning God woke up Jesus, and didn’t just wake him up. God woke Jesus up ready to listen and to learn. God woke up his ears. These Servant prophecies of Isaiah mention the Holy Spirit several times. When Jesus was baptized he received the Spirit, and the Spirit is a big part of Jesus learning.

*The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away.* Now the flavour changes a bit. God is not just giving him words to keep the weary people going, God is now asking his servant to do something difficult. “Others could choose to disobey,” says the Servant, “but that is not for me. I will not rebel, I 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.*

Now we know what God told him to do: “Offer your back to those who will beat you. Offer your cheeks to those who will pull out your beard. Open your face to mocking and spitting.” When God said that, this is how Jesus responded: *The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away.*

The emphasis here is on public shame and humiliation. For us, the physical pain of flogging and crucifixion is horrible, beyond imagination. Our Gospels mostly ignore that. For Jesus the Servant, obedience means walking into public shame. He will be treated like a despised 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, not 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 Jesus 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 lifts me up is near.*

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 makes things right is near.* In fact, Jesus will be disgraced, and he will be put to shame. If they beat your back, pull out your beard, mock you and spit on your face, then you are being openly disgraced and humiliated. This was the cup that Jesus dreaded to drink.

Jesus the Servant endures this because he's confident it will not end this way. He says to us, "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 completely obedient. And second, he set his face like flint because he knew God would help him, and be near him. If God was near and helping, this could only end very well for Jesus the Servant. And even with all that in place, Jesus had to set his face like flint.

The Servant fears nothing directly from God. Humans will treat the Servant terribly, but God will be near and will help him. There is nothing here about God pouring out his righteous wrath on the Servant. The cup was being completely at the mercy of a hostile murderous crowd. Jesus told James and John they would drink the same cup he had to drink. The Servant fears nothing from God.

Jesus did pray, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” We ourselves 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 very hard to believe. So also for Jesus.

*He who proves my innocence is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.*

They *did* bring charges against Jesus. They *did* accuse Jesus. They *did* condemn Jesus. Hundreds of years earlier Isaiah predicted all of that. We have to imagine Jesus reading this and learning from it. As he makes his last trip to Jerusalem, this is Jesus using this Scripture to talk to himself. This is Jesus talking to himself, knowing what’s coming and walking toward Jerusalem:

*“He who proves my innocence is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.”*

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

### 3 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. The NKJV is the only English Bible that uses “face” all three times, so I’ll read these from the NKJV.

*When the time had come for Jesus to be received up, He steadfastly set His **face** to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His **face**. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His **face** was set for the journey to Jerusalem.*

He set his face to go to Jerusalem. He sent messengers before his face. The Samaritans would not have him, because his face was set for Jerusalem.

In Greek, as in English, it is strange to use “face” three times in these lines. Normally Greek would not use “face” like that any more than English would, but Luke the writer is telling us something. By repeating the word “face,” Luke gets the attention of his readers. He wants them to scratch their heads and wonder: ‘why so much about ‘face.’?’” And some of them will know Isaiah 50, that the Lord’s Servant sets his face like flint to do what the Sovereign Lord told him to do.

Luke is telling us that at this moment, near the end of Luke 9, Jesus said to himself, “now it is time for me to do what the Father told me to do. It’s time to set my face for Jerusalem.” From then on he was headed to Jerusalem. Up till then, Jesus toured the towns and villages. He still did that, but now they were all on the way to Jerusalem.

#### 4 All of Luke 9 is a Turning Point for Jesus

In Luke 9:18, Jesus was praying alone, with his disciples close by. When he finished praying, he asked them who they thought he was. Peter answered for all of them: “The Christ of God.”

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

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, prepare for execution, and then follow me. It is the only way to save your life.”

Then Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray, and while there Jesus’ face was changed, he became glorious, and his clothes became like lightning. Then Moses and Elijah appeared, and they were talking with Jesus about his departure, which would soon happen in Jerusalem.

Then, still in Luke 9, Jesus predicted his death a second time. Luke tells us that the disciples had no idea what he was talking about. It was hidden from them, and they were afraid to ask.

And then comes our text, verses 51–53, where 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 we get to Luke 9:51, where he began his final trip to Jerusalem.

*When the time had come for Jesus to be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.*

#### 5 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, only five chapters later.

Jesus did not arrive in Jerusalem until the end of Luke 19, ten chapters after he set out for Jerusalem. 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.

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 killed and to rise, to be our strongest picture of Jesus.

In Luke, most of the Jesus we know 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 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.

6 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? 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. Jesus understands weakness because he himself experienced great weakness and temptation. Jesus had to pray himself through desperate situations. Jesus was faithful only because God heard his prayer and helped him. Isaiah 50 and Luke 9 give us the same story in different words. He's a friend when we must set our face like flint. He understands these things. Hang on to that.

Second, let's praise and thank him for being faithful. Revelation calls Jesus the faithful witness, because he set out for Jerusalem, and he did not rebel or turn away. We are saved by our faith in Jesus and also 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 to God.

Revelation 5: "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."

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.