

even after decades of preaching

I remain amazed at the options and choices involved in preparing a sermon
I firmly believe

that a dozen different preachers could preach a dozen different sermons on the same text
and every one of those sermons could be equally good or bad
the Point being there's not One 'right' sermon on any given text

there are right principles to be followed but you make choices as you follow them
and those choices lead to one, of what could have been a hundred different sermons
I don't know if that surprises you . . . more likely you've never given it a moment's thought
but in preparing sermons I'm making those choices all the time

so I think about it a lot

what you end up hearing is the finished product the 'final cut'
with no sense of 'the roads not taken'

the options the judgment calls . . . where it could have gone This way rather than That
you choose based on a variety of things

what's going on in the World? What do people need to hear? What's God showing you? Etc

Well I open this sermon talking about those possibilities
because I'm aware of how different this sermon could have been

tho you wouldn't know were I not mentioning it

We're in Isaiah chapter 50 which is a relatively brief 11 verses
and has, for Isaiah a relatively clear message

the Lord contrasts the disobedience of His people with the obedience of His Servant
and then charges the hearers to walk in obedience
pretty straight-forward

However in describing the obedience of the Servant
we learn it involves suffering He says, v6

6 I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard;
I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.

that verse, taken on its own, describes horrible enough experience

But for anyone aware of the Savior's suffering it kind of raises the whole constellation . . .

then the passage closes with . . . an unusual charge

we're charged to be obedient that's not unusual

what's unusual is the manner of the obedience

we're charged to be obedient, by walking in darkness

charged to trust God AS we walk in darkness

Rather than providing our own light

in biblical terms it's a very unusual picture and we'll consider it in depth

but as you may sense between the sufferings of the Savior

and a practical charge to walk in darkness

it was shaping up to be a rather somber sermon no rainbows and buttercups in this one . .

And that's okay not a problem in and of itself

Scripture reflects the full range of experience and preaching should as well

so, I was doing the ground work for this sermon

"settling in" to its somberness . .

when, laying out the 4th qtr sched I realized I'd be preaching on Isa 53

in 2 weeks

for those who don't know, Isa 53 is one of the classic passages on the Savior's suffering

Even if you don't know the reference you may recognize the wording . .

He was despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. [3]

yea . . that one An entire Chapter

in which Isaiah devotes his considerable poetic skill to describing the Savior's Suffering

and again, that is a 'good' thing no problem in and of itself

but that . . looming on the horizon presented a problem to me

because I could not productively do two successive sermons on Suffering

I can do One but 'One in a row' is about all I can handle

so I 'retrenched' and approached this sermon from a different angle

took some different forks in the road

it's still a sermon on Isa 50 and I hope a good one

and does not deny or ignore Suffering

It just doesn't 'feature' it the way I would have if we weren't doing Isa 53 in two weeks

ZZZ

So, with that said Let's read Isa 50

The passage opens with God speaking . . in exasperation about the sin of the people

1 Thus says the LORD:

"Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce, Whom I have put away?

Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you?

For your iniquities you have sold yourselves,

And for your transgressions your mother has been put away.

2 Why, when I came, was there no man? Why, when I called, was there none to answer?

Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?

Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness;

Their fish stink because there is no water, And die of thirst.

3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, And I make sackcloth their covering."

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The Lord is saying 'He's not the problem here' He didn't turn from them or abandon them
 He's got the power to save He's got the desire to save ?POINT OUT CLASSIC ISAIAH? FISH STINK?
 He didn't turn from them They turned from Him
 He didn't sell them they sold themselves
 He called them but They did not answer

[2] . . when [He] came, [there was] no man? . . , when [He] called, [there was no answer]?

He's got all the power it takes to save

as so often in the OT the Exodus from Egypt is recalled

His rebuke dried up the sea He hand darkened the sky

if Salvation's not going right if the process is 'breaking down' it's not His fault

that's vv 1 thru 3

then in complete contrast vv4-9

1 thru 3 are about the rebellious people 4 thru 9 are about the Obedient Servant

we're in the poriton of Isaiah where the figure of the Servant becomes prominent

it's one of the clearer, more direct portraits of the Messiah promised in the OT

we talked about Him last week, chapter 49 opens w/ the Servant speaking

He speaks again in Ch 50, vv 4 thru 9

4 "The Lord GOD has given Me The tongue of the learned,
 That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary.
 He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.
 5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not rebellious, Nor did I turn away.
 6 I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard;
 I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.
 7 "For the Lord GOD will help Me; Therefore I will not be disgraced;
 Therefore I have set My face like a flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.
 8 He is near who justifies Me; Who will contend with Me?
 Let us stand together. Who is My adversary? Let him come near Me.
 9 Surely the Lord GOD will help Me; Who is he who will condemn Me?
 Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; The moth will eat them up.

unlike the rebellious nation the servant is attentive, obedient and faithful

He knows how to listen, He knows how to speak

and he perseveres thru suffering does not hide His face from shame and spitting

it's not right that the servant is treated that way

the treatment itself manifests the very sin He comes to deliver us from

but there it is and there He is bearing it How? v7

7 "For the Lord GOD will help Me; Therefore I will not be disgraced;
 Therefore I have set My face like a flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.
 8 He is near who justifies Me;

God is near, the Lord is helping him

the passage then closes with a Direct but . . unusual challenge vv10 and 11

10 Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant?
 Who walks in darkness And has no light?

900

Let him trust in the name of the LORD And rely upon his God.
11 Look, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with sparks:
Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled—
This you shall have from My hand: You shall lie down in torment.

what's unusual about that is the call to walk in darkness
trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon God without light v10
we're to do that instead of providing our own light v11

rather than trusting God THRU the darkness
in v11 some kindle a fire and encircle themselves with sparks
other translations say 'torches' or 'firebrands'

The Point being instead of trusting God in the Dark
they 'make their own light' so they can 'see their own way' thru the darkness
The Lord says "This you shall have from My hand: You shall lie down in torment."

TONE

Whoa this is serious!
it's not one of those things where
some people obey God this way & others obey God that way
& everything's fine either way that's NOT what's goin on here
this is Good & Bad Right & Wrong Life & Death
if and when we're called to walk in darkness
we're to Trust Him rely on His Name NOT provide our own light

So as we encounter the Servant in Isa 50
whom we know in fuller revelation as our Lord Jesus Christ
we'll focus on 3 of His Traits Gentleness Determination and Trust
The Servant is Gentle

He knows how to speak A word in season to him who is weary
The Servant is Determined
He sets His face like a Flint
& the Servant Trusts God
to guide Him thru the dark rather than providing His own light

ZZZ

So consider the Gentleness of the Servant He says, v4
4 "The Lord GOD has given Me The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary.

a 'word in season' is the traditional phrase
other translations have a word that 'sustains' the weary or 'comforts' the weary
the point being What He says is Fitting Appropriate for the weary

there are words for the Happy and words for the Healthy
150614 SERMON

1130

words for the Excited and the Curious
but none of those are words . . . for the weary
the weary need comfort the weary need encouragement the weary need Gentleness
soft not hard quiet not loud tender not tough
cuz the weary don't have much margin it's all used up that's why they're 'weary'
they feel like the Camel, so overburdened just one more straw will break its back
the Servant knows how to speak to that He knows what they need to hear
something like:

SLOWLY

28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." [Mt 11:28-30]

He's Gentle

and it appears a lot of 'learning' goes into that v4 in full reads

4 "The Lord GOD has given Me The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary.
He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.

the Servant has learned

that's what enables Him to speak the word in season

FAST/SLOW

He knows how to talk because He knows how to listen

& He has listened does listen morning by morning

one of my 'character flaws' is that although I like to learn

I also like to 'wrap things up' Learn whatever it is then file it and move on

and that works well enough for things like State Capitals and Multiplication tables

but it does not work well with people

the ability to speak the word that sustains the weary

doesn't come from having a lot of information at your command

it comes from listening Listening to God and listening to people

it's a dynamic, interactive process not something you can finish and file

and it takes Gentleness

which Isaiah, in his own way, has highlighted in the Lord and His Servant

tho you may not recall it

we understand when we're talking about God

we're talking about Vast Power and Perfect Holiness

He made the World and He's Judging the World and it's all Huge and Overwhelming . . .

The trait of Gentlness isn't the first thing that comes to mind

but it's just as real Remember the basic themes of Isaish

Judgment and . . . Comfort

remember how the second part of the book begins? Ch 40 v1

1 "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God.
2 "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,
That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned;

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you . . . Comfort

I will give you Rest.

Gentleness is no less an attribute of God than Holiness or Majesty

and Isaiah puts them side by side

in that Marvelous 40th chapter where he describes the majesty of God

do you remember where he asks Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand

[or] measured heaven with a span?

the 'waters' are the vastness of the Oceans

yet He measures them in the hollow of His hand

that little indentation in the center of your palm

and if you stretch your hand out

the distance between the tip of your little finger and the tip of your thumb that's a Span

He measures the heavens with a span of His hand

He is Hugely Immensely BIG that's Isa 40, 12

you know what the verse right before it says?

11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.

12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,
measured heaven with a span?

it's the same Person the same Being

and the awesome power may be the first thing that strikes us that's understandable

but He's also gentle like a Shepherd

that's why there's so much shepherd imagery in scripture

i have little personal experience with sheep

but it's widely reported they're stupid and slow and helpless and timid

they do not have it together they are High Maintenance

if you're gonna take care of them, you're gonna have to do it gently

That's why Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd, John 10

He says He calls His own sheep by name

and they follow Him, because they know His voice

they know He's there to take care of them

He says the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep

contrasts it with a bad shepherd, a hireling,

just there to make a buck doesn't care about the sheep
the wolf shows up the hireling's outta there because he doesn't care
Jesus says 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and [my sheep know me].
15 . . and I lay down My life for [them].

No greater love . .

Psalms 23 1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.
3 He restores my soul;

there's a word in season to the weary He'll restore your soul

your soul broken, your soul bruised, your soul empty?

Because He loves you and He knows how to take care of you gently

green pastures . . still waters . . He'll restore your soul

ZZZ

and you can count on that because He was determined He was committed

He had set His face like flint Isa 50, v7

v7 "For the Lord GOD will help Me; Therefore I will not be disgraced;
Therefore I have set My face like a flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed

it's in light of the difficulty, the suffering that He has to set His face like flint

you don't have to be determined to walk an easy path because . . it's easy!

When incarnate, the Servant said Mt 7, 13 and ff

13 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction,
and there are many who go in by it.

14 [But] narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life,
and there are few who find it.

NOTE/MERGE FROM 4

it doesn't take determination to walk the broad way thru the wide gate

that's the path of least resistance, it's what's gonna happen

unless you decide otherwise

but it does take determination to walk the difficult way thru the narrow gate

it takes effort Attention Intention Commitment

here in isa 50 the Servant's commitment is in contrast to the people

who've been Up and Down in and out hot and cold

Not Him He's consistent because he has set his face like a flint

flint is a brittle form of rock so brittle it will 'hold an edge'

it was an important commodity in the ancient world for arrow heads, knives and the like
and its hardness, and perhaps its sharpness is the basis for the image

you know Isaiah is frequently quoted in the NT

and while quotes are clear and distinct, there's more to the story

there's also allusions and echos they're a bit fuzzier, but they're there

you may have sensed one, drawn from vv8 and 9 of Isa 50

8 He is near who justifies Me; Who will contend with Me?

Let us stand together. Who is My adversary?

Let him come near Me.

9 Surely the Lord GOD will help Me; Who is he who will condemn Me?

Ring a bell?

Paul doesn't exactly quote that, but he echos it, reprises it in Romans 8

31 If God is for us, who can be against us? . . .

33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

34 Who is he who condemns?

Well, the servant setting His face like flint is also drawn on

in the gospel of Luke which has something of a geographical structure

revolving around Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem

the turning point is lk 9:51 which reads:

51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up,
that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,

from there on in the narrative it's just that journey

and you know what awaited Him in Jerusalem He did

He'd known from the beginning, more properly, from BEFORE the beginning

in eternity past, before the Creation of heaven & earth

the Triune God knew what would happen and determined how to deal with it

we've talked recently about the Church being a mystery

listen to how that's described in terms of time

the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, Col 1:26

the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God Eph 3:9

the mystery kept secret since the world began Ro 16:25

I don't want to delve too deeply into this just a couple of other verses to make the point

Eph 1, 3 and 4

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,

'He' God the Father 'choose us in Him' Jesus Christ BEFORE the foundation of the World

of course this brings up Predestination a fascinating and worthwhile subject

but not the point I'm making

the point I'm making is The Plan and the Commitment were in place Before the World Began

First Peter 1

18 . . . you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold . . .

19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world,

again, don't get side-tracked on 'forordaination'

the key phrase for our purposes is 'before the foundation of the world'

That takes us back before Genesis 1:1

God is not . . . responding to things as they unfold

He knew Everything Before there was Anything

and in that knowledge Father, Son and Spirit made the commitment to Redeem

Jesus determined to do what it took to save you Before time began

of course in His earthly life we see it unfold in time

as Luke tells us He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem

as the hour approached He felt it, He agonized you know the prayer in Gethsemane

Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me;
nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Turns out there was no other way to provide salvation

one of the many blessings of which is

that we have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses

it was as horrible and repellant to Him as it would be to you or me, even moreso

but the only reason there IS salvation is because He had determined to go thru with it

Good old Peter, tried to stop it by drawing his sword

Remember what Jesus said to him?

Put away your sword

Don't you realize that if I asked the Father, He'd provide 12 legions of Angels?

But how then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus? [Mt 26:52-54 para]

Jesus could have shut it down any time He wanted to

He didn't have to do it He chose to do it and He kept choosing to do it all the way thru

because it was already known and already recorded in Scripture

we'll get a big dose of that in two weeks - Isa 53

I close this portion with a quote from the great 19th century preacher C.H. Spurgeon

"O you redeemed ones, on whose behalf this strong resolve was made—

you who have been bought by the precious blood of this steadfast, resolute Redeemer—

come and think awhile of Him, that your hearts may burn within you

and that your faces may be set like flints to live and die for Him who lived and died for you!"

— C.H. Spurgeon

2545

So we turn in conclusion to Trust

the trust exemplified by the Servant and enjoined upon us vv10 and 11

10 Who among you fears the LORD? Who obeys the voice of His Servant?
Who walks in darkness And has no light?
Let him trust in the name of the LORD And rely upon his God.

11 Look, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with sparks:
Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled—
This you shall have from My hand: You shall lie down in torment.

as we've already noted the imagery is unusual

because almost all the time in Scripture the presence of God is associated with light
in the beginning darkness was on the face of the deep

and God said Let there be light and there was Light

and God saw the light that it was good Amen

Jesus said He was the light of the World

& whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life Jn 8:12 Amen

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you,
that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 1 Jn 1:5 amen and amen

all very good and true that's how Scripture frames it almost all the time

Isa 50 is an exception that talks about walking with God THRU darkness

wanna be sure I'm speaking clearly here don't want to be misunderstood

it's not saying God IS darkness, not saying that at all

it's saying when WE'RE in the dark confused, hurting, suffering . .

when we're traveling THAT portion of the road

we should trust Him in the dark Rather than providing our own Light

but the 'weird' thing is if we're trusting Him

it would SEEM we're in His presence but it's still dark

[His] word is a lamp to [our] feet And a light to [our] path. Psa. 119:105

. . we have the prophetic word confirmed,
which [we] do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, 2 Pet 1:19

6 weeks ago in Isa 43 we talked about the Glory of God

and its primary physical manifestation emanating from His Presence is Light

but in Isa 50:10 there IS NO LIGHT

and you might be thinkin 'Chris, you're makin too big a deal out of this'

I don't think so because the contrast is with those who

instead of bearing the darkness provide their OWN Light

11 Look, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with sparks:
~~(other translations have torches or firebrands there)~~ ???

Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled—
(they are walkin by the 'light' they have produced)

This you shall have from My hand: You shall lie down in torment.

That is not a good result That's not what you want to have happen
without doubt the point is to Trust God walking thru darkness

ZZZ

Which is unusual but not unprecedented, at least one other instance I'm aware of
and that is the book of Job which is, of course, about suffering, unjust suffering
 he didn't deserve it or earn it in any way
 but he sure got it!

and he had a lot to say about darkness

He has fenced up my way, so that I cannot pass; And He has set darkness in my paths. 19:8

A land as dark as darkness itself, As the shadow of death, without any order,
Where even the light is like darkness.' " 10:22

. . God made my heart weak, And the Almighty terrifies me;
Because I was not cut off from the presence of darkness,
And He did not hide deep darkness from my face. 23:16&17

Job expressed some pretty raw emotion it is no fun, to walk in the darkness

 it's terrible, horrible ALMOST unbearable

but Job bore it, with the Lord's approval

 he did NOT kindle his own fire or light his own lamp

tho that is, in effect, what his comforters were trying to do Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar

the book is essentially a debate between Job & those 3

 about whether or not he deserved what happened to him

and we're told up front he did not

but the only way those three can 'make sense' of it, is to insist that he did

he must have sinned somehow and Job says 'did not', and they say 'did so'

round and round well, in conclusion

the Lord tells them they were wrong, and they have to have Job offer a sacrifice on their behalf
"because you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has" [42:8]

and . . yea Job may seem a bit 'out there'

so here's a couple more practical instances of people kindling their own fire .

in Exodus 32 Moses was up on the mountain meeting with God

and the people got . . anxious, didn't like waiting

so they decided to make an idol something they could understand, that made sense to them

this is the infamous 'Golden Calf' you probably know that did not go well

but the point is they didn't want to trust, they didn't want to wait

it felt like . . walking in darkness

so they decided to fix it their way kindled their own fire to see them thru

Different example 1 Samuel 8

the period of the judges is coming to an end because the people want a King

they want a king so they can be like all the other nations

they didn't like being different

it was . . . uncomfortable felt like walking in darkness

they didn't want to trust, they didn't want to rely they wanted some light

how can they get some on their terms? Let's have a king!

so they ask Samuel for a king and samuel prays to the Lord 1 Sam 8:7

7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.

the Judges ruled with direct authority from God,

but instead of rejoicing in that, the people sought to do away with it

there's an element of humor in this

because the Lord tells Samuel to be sure to tell the people what a King is actually gonna do

he's gonna tax them and take their sons for his army and their daughters for his palace

he'll skim off the best of their produce and commandeer the best of their land

political corruption is not a modern phenomenon

anyway Samuel tells them all this 1Sam. 8:19

19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel;

and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us,

20 that we also may be like all the nations

Woe to those who kindle their own light

'walking in darkness' isn't comfortable, it isn't easy, it isn't pleasing

but in this sin-marred world sometimes it is necessary

and when you are called to rely upon God and you have No Light

remember we follow the Servant, the Savior's example He led the way

and never lose sight of the fact

that tho we may be called to walk THRU darkness

He has not called us we are not walking TO Darkness

it's not the destination, it's not the conclusion it's just part of the journey

a hard part, a painful part one where you're going to have to trust in deeper ways

but just part of the journey to be with God Who Is Light

In Whom is No Darkness at all