

*June 30, 2019*

*Isaiah 50:6-7; Luke 9:51-62*

***“Set Your Face Like Flint”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As I was considering the words of our Gospel lesson for this morning: “he set his face to go to Jerusalem,” my thoughts drifted to the words of the prophet Isaiah. Please keep in mind that the words written by Isaiah are about Jesus roughly seven-hundred years before he was born. In fact, they are the words of Jesus himself (Is. 50:6-7): “I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.” We note a kind of defiance in the words of Jesus as quoted by the prophet Isaiah. He will endure and will accomplish his task. Nothing will stop it.

It certainly appears that when Luke wrote that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem,” he had these words from Isaiah (of our Savior) in mind: “I have set my face like a flint.” They are wonderful words. To paraphrase a popular preacher from 1880:

The fact is that our Master, even from eternity, resolved to save ... and nothing could keep him from the accomplishment of His purpose. From eternity He foresaw that humanity would fall ... He decided to redeem them ... It was an all-consuming passion that burned within his soul ... as he said later in the Gospel of Luke, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished (Luke 12:50)!” His love and determination to save us should stir up our hearts that we may also love him, and be just as resolved to follow him as he has pursued us (Charles H. Spurgeon).

He set his face like a flint. **Set Your Face Like Flint.** The figurative language of flint is a good one. Flint is very hard sedimentary rock that occurs as nodules in limestone deposits. It was one of the hardest substances around in ancient Israel. Setting your face like flint implies that you’re expecting some opposition, to stand strong in the face of adversity. To set your face like flint means to regard these difficulties as worthwhile when you consider where they will lead you. Arthur A. Just writes: “Jesus, the Servant, is resolutely determined to go to the cross, fully aware of the torture and humiliation involved. He trusts in eventual vindication by the Father, and he knows that the cross is the only way to procure salvation for humanity.”

*The Son of God Goes Forth to War* was the sermon hymn we sang a few moments ago. He goes to Jerusalem a “kingly crown to gain. His blood-red banner streams afar,” and when the Samaritans realize that he is headed there, they did not receive him because they considered Jerusalem to be false. They were looking for the good gifts of God in another place. Like so many today, they oppose Jesus and his destination. There must be another way, another place, another Jesus. The Samaritan village rejects Christ. They had a song to play, but Jesus wasn’t going to dance to their tune, but his face is set toward Jerusalem, for the gift he brings is himself for the life of the world.

The rejection of Jesus was a terrible frustration that turned to anger for James and John who want the Samaritan village to be consumed by fire. It is reminiscent of the time when Elijah separated the true

God of Israel from Baal. Fire from heaven descends on the altar of the Lord and proves that he is God. In that time, the Lord chose to show the truth in judgment. But in our text, what James and John wants is the consuming of the Samaritans who, if that is to happen, will not be able to believe in and confess Jesus in the future. They failed to understand what we ourselves sometimes fail to understand. It is not our task to deal with those who reject Jesus and His work. In fact, the wicked will not necessarily be dealt with in the present world at all, but will frequently appear to have it all. In those moments, we embrace then the incredible patience of God, which means salvation. And with his face set like flint, Jesus pressed on as we are bid to press on with him. And, as we read this text, we are bid to explore for a moment if we are like the Samaritans, or perhaps James and John calling down the wrath of God on those who oppose us.

If the Samaritans would have known and believed, and if James and John would have understood things rightly, the whole lot of them would have simply dropped everything to follow Jesus to Jerusalem. Indeed! The Samaritans would have left their village behind with all their false worship, and James and John would have left the fire up to Jesus for another day. But you see, to set your face like flint along with Jesus means that you are headed to a destination that reinterprets they way you see things and your whole life. It sets priorities straight in ways that may not necessarily be comfortable.

For the Samaritans, the heart of worship should have been clearly grasped in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is the gracious presence of God. For James and John, the priority should have been an understanding of the words of Jesus in John 3:17, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." Yes, there will be a day of fire, but Paul says (1 Cor. 6:2): "behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

So, where do we fit in with all of this. You might recall that a few moments ago I paraphrased an old time preacher from 1880. He quoted the words of Jesus, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished (Luke 12:50)!" If you don't mind, I would like to take a little side road connected to our text to have you consider the remarkable conversation that we find in Mark chapter 10. James and John go to Jesus and make the request for one to sit on his right and the other on his left in glory. The account goes on to relate:

Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

There is much we could say about this, but the point that I want you to see is that for Jesus there is a cup to drink and a baptism to undergo. James and John have entirely misunderstood the words of Jesus. But, what is important here is that Jesus says that they will drink the cup that he drinks, and will be baptized with the baptism that he is baptized. As Kurt Marquart writes, "Clearly, the Lord chose these words to describe his saving work because he was going to establish for his Church these two, baptism and a cup, as wondrous ways in which his cross and the salvation gained there might come and be given to us." That

which is given in our baptism is from Jesus' baptism and cross. His cup of suffering is the cup of our salvation as his body and blood is given to eat and drink for the forgiveness of all our sins. Being a disciple of Christ is not about being great or having power. It is not about sitting at the right or left hand of Jesus. As Jesus sets his face like flint on his destiny in Jerusalem and the cross, where he will undergo the fullness of his baptism and will drink the cup that is our salvation, we are to set our faces on the same. **Set Your Face Like Flint** on your baptism and the cup, for to do so is to set your face on Jerusalem and Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

When all distractions are finally dealt with, there is nothing for the Samaritans or, for that matter, James and John to do other than to follow Jesus in order to die with him and live. This is the meaning of the rest of our Gospel lesson where we are bid to fix our eyes on the author and perfecter of life:

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

To follow Jesus means to die with him at Jerusalem and the cross. To follow Jesus is to be baptized with a burial with Jesus that we might rise with him. To follow Jesus is to leave the desires of our sinful flesh behind, to flee the trappings of this unbelieving world, and refuse the false promises of Satan for the cup where the sufferings and death of Jesus are given to us that we might have the medicine of immortality. We give up the comfortable pillows to rest our heads, our family is the family of God, and the burial of the dead are not all that important in comparison to the kingdom of God.

As Jesus set his face like flint, so also **Set Your Face Like Flint**. Indeed, we put our hand to the plow and we keep our focus ahead - and with it a straight line to our destination. If we are baptized with Jesus' baptism and if we drink the cup he drank, then we set our face like flint toward Jerusalem as he did, or as we will be singing in just a moment . . . *Jerusalem the Golden* "with milk and honey blest - the promise of salvation, the place of peace and rest."

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott