

Jonathan Mark  
FMC Reedley  
Isaiah 50  
3/24/2024

### Face Like Flint

Good Morning, Church, I believe that Jesus triumphantly entering Jerusalem on a donkey teaches us something unique about Jesus that we won't get in parables or healings. Jesus is trotting forward toward his accusers with a face like flint. This triumphal entry and later the passion will show us that Jesus's way of peace and justice is not only talk or kindness. It is bold and unflinching. So, let us dive deep into Isaiah to see what a prophet looks like.

I invite you to pray with me.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our shield and example. Amen.

Set your face like flint.

Those words called me this week as I considered Jesus coming to Jerusalem. Was Jesus setting his face like flint when he entered the city and headed to the temple? A phrase that inspires a sense of determination in the face of adversity. Setting your face like flint is the determination of Jesus to take the cup and accept that his hour has come. So join me in considering Isaiah 50, this third servant poem.

It is easy to look up to people who have set their faces like flint. I see them standing up to injustice or riding into Jerusalem. I especially think about preachers I have heard proclaiming a challenging and spirit-filled word that sustains my mind and heart. I was struck by the passion in those who came to call for peace in Gaza and Korea this past week. But everyone who goes to visit a representative, organize a march, or preach a sermon begins the same way, as a baby child, like our new baby Adam. And morning by morning, our teachers, parents, and mentors teach us. Our teachers light a fire for knowledge and right-ness. Even Jesus began this way, learning from his mother, prophetess Mary, teachers in the temple, and many others that we are not told about.

Set your face like flint, for the sake of those who came before.

Isaiah uses the phrase, "wakens my ear." Stephen Breck Reid explains, "The verb 'arose' is like the use of smelling salts. The ammonia carbonate wakes up a person who has been edging into unconsciousness." You could also understand "waken" through the 20th-century word "woke," to mean being "aware of injustice." Initially, "woke" came from the Jamaican philosopher Marcus Garvey, telling fellow African Americans to wake up to how racism worked and how Jim Crow operated systematically. So yes, wake up and listen. If you go into the lion's den, you

best understand how the powers and principalities operate in this world. If Jesus is going to stand trial, he has better know that the Romans would only crucify him if they thought he wanted to become the King of the Jews.

Set your face like flint, because you know what is coming.

Now, I know that this next verse is difficult for some of you. “I was not rebellious [and] I did not turn backward.” Little is more annoying than a self-righteous person who thinks they have not made a mistake. If we consider the context of this passage, Isaiah is writing at the end of exile. So it may be the servant saying they are from a different generation than the “rebellious generation” from the exile. Another way to interpret this passage is to look at the next verse. “I give my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who pulled my beard.” So, this profession of innocence could be someone reacting nonviolently in the face of abuse. The servant turns the other cheek, using persuasion rather than violence.

Set your face like flint, because the way of the servant is dangerous.

And so the servant goes to court. Like Job professing innocence, the servant hopes God will hear his case. Because God is a helper, a rescuer, a savior. And God is a vindicator or justice-maker. The servant can set his face like flint because God is a savior and justice-maker. And so the servant will keep teaching and fighting for what they believe is right. They will face adversity and rely on the universe's arc turning toward justice. The servant may not see the promised land, but they have been to the mountaintop and see that coming glory. The servant can show the way through the wilderness.

Set your face like flint, because we are heading to the promised land.

So I want to bless you all when you feel like your face is like flint and you are vindicated by God. But I also bless the times you are awakened to something new and must repent of your old ways. I want to bless you in your faithful actions as we all try to be a people of peace together. Remember that they are all made in the image of God, trying their best to be faithful people. And praise be the moments when we ask tough questions and grow into a more mature faith.

Now, as you set your face like flint, remember to leave the stone unthrown by singing together number 580.