

A Praying Community, John Guernsey, October 18, 2020

Series Goal | May our love for Christ, and Christ's love for us, foster a togetherness that bears witness to the Gospel of Hope, which we hold out to a weary and divided world.

Key Scripture | Ezekiel 3; Zechariah 7; Isaiah 50; Luke 9 & 19; 1 Samuel 12

Sermon Outline & Questions

We are called to be people of truth and love. How do we live well during polarized times? Consider the following four passages from Scripture:

1. Ezekiel

God called Ezekiel in 597 BC. Babylon had captured Jerusalem and had taken Ezekiel as a captive. God made it clear to Ezekiel that he would not have an easy ministry—his own people (the Israelites) were not going to listen to his prophetic word, because of their stubbornness and hard-heartedness.

But God gave Ezekiel what he needed ([v. 3:8](#)). God made Ezekiel as solid for the truth as the Israelites were in their disobedience.

Ezekiel was to be bold, courageous, and firm in the truth. Ezekiel was not to compromise God's word or fold under the pressure (We are called to these things, too.)

God also commanded Ezekiel to keep his heart open and tender to God's word ([v. 3:10](#)); to be moved by the things that move the heart of God.

In what ways do we seek what is 'easy' over what God calls us to? Despite his difficult calling, what kept Ezekiel grounded, hopeful, and steadfast?

2. Zechariah

Zechariah was a prophet to the Israelites. In [chapter 7](#), God—through Zechariah—commanded the people to show “kindness and mercy” to each other. 7:8. But the Israelites “refused to pay attention” (v. 7:11).

The people compromised God's truth. They became hard-hearted where they ought to have been tender. They were 'squishy' where they ought to have been strong like flint.

Consider how technology is shaping (i.e., damaging) our character. Social media fosters polarization, destroying our capacity for empathy. We're fed a polarized diet of material created by algorithms.

Yet God call us to be hard like flint in his truth, yet tender to his words and toward one another.

What things in your life (e.g., social media, habits, hobbies, etc.) are making you 'squishy' or hard-hearted? Is there any area of your life in which you “refuse to pay attention” to God?

3. Isaiah & Luke

The third 'servant song' comes in Isaiah 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.

Later, in Luke 9:51, we read that Jesus “set his face” to go to Jerusalem (where he would die). Jesus was strong like flint in his uncompromising obedience to God’s word.

But then, in Luke 19:41, we read that Jesus “wept” over Jerusalem and its unbelief. Jesus was tender hearted toward his heavenly father’s love for the people.

The challenge for us, then, is to have set our faces “set like flint” against all things that compromise God’s truth, but to still be tender-hearted toward God and people.

How do we do this? See no. 4.

Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem yet set his face like a flint. How did he do this?

4. 1 Samuel

The Israelites wanted a human king; was disobedience to God’s commands. Samuel warned the people against asking for a king, but they did not listen to him.

In v. 12:20, Samuel encourages the people to keep seeking and serving the Lord. How is Samuel able to be so gracious? In v. 12:23, Samuel says,

Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.

Prayer is key to keeping Samuel’s heart right toward sinful men.

Samuel was praying for God to work in the Israelites’ lives—that God would bless the people and the nation.

God may be giving *you* insight into the sins of others or the nation. This is so that you may intercede.

As a spiritual discipline, consider adopting a prayer for one public figure who you believe stands for everything that’s wrong in our culture. Ask God to give you a heart—God’s heart—for that person. (And then pray as the Lord leads.)

Concluding thoughts—

We are messengers of truth *and* ministers of reconciliation.

We need God’s grace to be strong as flint (i.e., uncompromising in God’s word) and tender-hearted (i.e., to hear God’s word and love others).

We must be bold and humble; we must be a community that prays.

What is one thing that stood out to you in this sermon?

What might Christ be saying to you? What truth can you seek to apply to your daily life?