



Catalog No. 837

Isaiah 50:4-6

Eighth Message

Brian Morgan

November 25, 1990

THE SCHOOL FOR DISCIPLES (PART 1): FACING REJECTION

SERIES: A NEW SERVANT, A NEW COVENANT, A NEW AGE

As I was rummaging through my garage recently I found an old gun box which brought back memories of a special person. Bob Munson did some carpentry work for my parents when I was 11 years old, and for two weeks I was his eager helper. For my reward, he promised to take me deer hunting the following year. He signed me up for safety school, which I had to pass in order to get a hunting license. Then we spent hours in his garage building a gun box. He took me out in the fields to teach me how to shoot. He had no sons of his own, so in a sense I became his adopted son.

Finally, the day came for the deer hunt. We meticulously packed his pickup truck with everything we needed. We camped by a lumber camp, found an old cowboy cabin built with hand-split shingles, and settled down for the night in two oversized beds. At 4 a.m. we began to stalk the trails. We stopped at a trail head, hid behind large granite stones, and the long wait began. We did this every year for five years, but the weather never turned cold enough to bring deer that far south. But I didn't care. The memories were the important thing. Everything he did, I wanted to do; everything he said, I said; everything he was, I wanted to be.

This kind of yearning is part of our lives as Christians. We want a Father figure to come into our lives and train us in spiritual matters. We want to be disciples. This is not wrong; it is in line with the great commission of Jesus Christ, who after his resurrection commissioned his disciples by saying: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18-19a).

Being a disciple of Christ and making disciples is the goal of this age for which God has instructed us and given us all of his resources to accomplish. But what is involved in being a disciple? Is every Christian to be one? What is the goal of discipleship? Who will teach me? How much of the education depends upon me? What help can I expect to receive to get through the course? Are the results secure?

Isaiah addresses these questions as he writes about the Servant to come in the passage which we will look at this morning, Isaiah 50:4-7. In the prior Servant Song (49:1-13), the prophet focused on the testimony of the Son and the Father regarding the ministry of the Servant. This next song focuses on the School of the Servant, from his own words. The text reads much like a curriculum catalogue for a university by listing the different aspects of the Servant's education: Goal, Faculty, Prerequisites, Course Requirements, and Assets needed to get through the course. The Servant concludes by applying the school to us, and exhorting us to enter it with him. Thus we have one of the clearest passages in Scripture on the school for disciples.

We will take this text, verses 4-11 of Isaiah 50, in two parts. Today we will take verses 4-6; and next week we will look at verses 7-11.

**The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples,
That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.
The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not disobedient,
Nor did I turn back.
I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover my face from humiliation and spitting. (Isa
50:4-6 NASB)**

I. The goal of the school (50:4a)

A. To learn how to speak

The goal of the Servant's education is to learn how to speak: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned." It is this effective tongue (which has the power to penetrate through God's word) that Jesus will use to bring forth the kingdom of God. The word "disciples" (*lamad*, "to learn"; *lemudim*, "learned one," from which the later term Talmud is derived) has the idea of learning through sheer repetition until one is accustomed to something and it becomes part of their nature (Jer 13:23; Isa 54:13). Thus the mark of greatness is not how accurately you throw a football, or how much money you make, but, can you speak effectively? God created the universe through speech. The apex of his creation is man, who is created in his image, and is gifted with speech so that he can rule the world. In Genesis 2, man obeys God by naming all the animals, and then his wife. But in chapter 3, everything is destroyed by the devil's deceitfulness, by his using speech to deceive man. From that day on man's speech is sprinkled with guilt, defensiveness, and paranoia; communication has been broken.

B. In an appropriate manner

"To sustain (answer) the weary one with a word." We have lost this ability, haven't we? Just look at the high-tech world of computers, or think about the number of lawyers we have today. We are busy sorting, filing, categorizing, charting, indexing, storing, retrieving, faxing, collating, binding. We are given so much printed matter that we must hire professionals to sift through it all. The bottom line is, no one takes the time to inquire and ask "How are you?" So the legal world comes into play. Two parties refuse to speak, or are unable to speak, so they must hire lawyers to help them communicate. But this is not communication of the heart; they end up talking past each other. But not so with the Servant.

Thus the goal of the Servant's education is to learn how to speak in an appropriate manner in order to bring refreshing life to those who are at their wits' end. This is fulfilled in Jesus as we see him in the gospels seeking out the weary in every situation, and knowing how to give the appropriate word (he seldom gives the same formulation twice).

There are three stages to this. The Servant has an eye to see what the normal eye cannot see, an ear to listen, and wisdom to give an appropriate word in response. To a religious Nicodemus, he spoke of the need to be “born from above;” to a thirsty Samaritan woman, he spoke of “living water;” to a hungry crowd, he spoke of himself as “the true bread.” Thus, the goal of our speech is not to patronize people with pat answers, but to ask God for the wisdom for the right word that is appropriate to their need. This is our task, says the apostle Paul in these words, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph 4:29).

Last week, a friend came to me and said he had been praying for an opportunity to speak a word about Jesus to his friend, and that this man had just told him his 22-year-old son had died suddenly. What do you say to a man who has just lost his son? A woman who works in the local Crisis Pregnancy Center needs a word to speak to a 15-year-old couple who asked for a pregnancy test. The boy told my friend that he was showing his love for this girl by using condoms. What do you say in a situation like this? Another friend’s secretary has sclerosis of the liver—only 10% of her liver is functioning. He needs a word to say to her. I know a man who is counseling a woman whose baby was stillborn. What can he say to her? What do you husbands say to your wives when you come home in the evening to a war zone situation? You don’t want to escalate the tension, but you don’t know what to say to alleviate it. Ours is a generation that needs more than any other to learn how to speak, but this is probably our weakest area.

The goal of the Servant’s education is to learn to speak in an appropriate manner, to be skilled at answering the weary one with a word.

Next, the Servant tells us the faculty of the school.

II. The faculty of the school: The Lord God (50:4b)

The reason we choose to attend a certain school is not its buildings, or its programs, but the faculty, especially the faculty to student ratio. This was a big disappointment to me when I first attended Stanford. I was just a freshman sitting among 300 other freshmen, peering down the long aisles at a professor reading his notes.

But things are very different with this faculty.

A. A personal tutorial initiated by God

“He awakens Me morning by morning,” says our text. Furthermore, it is

B. A personal tutorial taught by God

“He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.” It’s a one-on-one thing, initiated and taught by God himself. Here we are told the amazing truth that the Father himself roused Jesus every morning to personally teach him (“Morning by morning” carries with it two ideas, that of being first priority, and continuous). This theme takes us back to the garden of Eden, where God walked alongside Adam in the cool of the garden in order to teach him. Thus, before the Servant could speak he had to listen. His role is that of a prophet, speaking from what he hears the Father say. This is why Jesus frequently sought seclusion from everyone—in order to hear what the Father had to say to him. His words are the very words of God. This is why he could make the claim, “For I did not speak on My own initiative,

but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak” (John 12:49).

Jesus spent most of his study time working through the book of Deuteronomy, the Psalms, and the book of Isaiah. Those were his three favorite books. If you want to study three books in the New Testament, I would suggest the gospel of John, the book of Acts, and the epistle to the Romans. If you do this, the Holy Spirit will prompt you during the day, giving you insight in a personal tutorial.

In the age of the New Covenant we all enter into this relationship, according to Isaiah: “And all your sons will be disciples of the Lord; And the well being of your sons will be great” (Isa 54:13). Your quiet time therefore is not a question of your having to grind out your devotions. Know that the Father longs to be with you. I discovered this through personal experience. Despite my grand plans to read through the Bible every year, etc., I never could accomplish my goals. What changed my thinking was learning that God the Father was awaiting me every day to teach me in his classroom.

Bob Munson took the initiative to teach me, and I listened to his every word. When he was coming to do a project in our house, I waited for up to two hours, looking out my bedroom window to see his truck arrive. When he said to me, “Leave my tools out overnight and you are flirting with death, lad,” that made an impact on me. When he told me, “Don’t ever have sex with a woman before you are married,” I placed his words in my heart, although he wasn’t a Christian. How tragic it is to realize that though the Father is sitting in the classroom every morning, ready to teach us, still we run off to our busy affairs and refuse to listen. How many times during the day he is ready to teach us, but we respond by turning on the radio or the TV and refuse to hear him. He has a gentle voice, but we must first listen and block out all other distractions.

The goal of the Servant’s education is to learn to speak, and the faculty is a tutorial with the Father. What are the entrance requirements?

III. The entrance requirements of the school (50:4)

He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.

College entrance requirements are becoming more demanding each year. I was at a back to school night for my junior high, and a teacher announced to all of us that our kids were not ready for high school. He said his own daughter had a 3.75 GPA and yet was turned down by UCLA. A few years ago, when I sought admission to Berkeley to take some post-graduate courses in Ancient Near Eastern studies, they refused me admission because they said I could not “compete.” When I told them that learning, not competing, was my purpose in applying, they responded by saying I had to return first to undergraduate school and take a whole list of other courses. But in the school for disciples there is only one requirement—listening: “He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.”

Are you willing to be attentive and obey? If you are, God will teach you the truth “and the truth will set you free.” Unlike the servant Israel who could not rouse herself to listen to God, this Servant is awakened and his ear is open to heed God’s word. God has in fact opened his ear. This is the same role Jesus takes up with us, as we see in the miracle of the deaf mute. “*Ephphatha!*” (“be opened!”) said Jesus to this man, “And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.” (Mark 7:31-37.) In the same way, if you are open to hear God, he will open your

ear and give you the ability to hear and obey. So it is not an intellectual, but a moral issue. Are you willing to be attentive, and obey?

There is a wonderful story in 2 Chronicles concerning King Jehoshaphat, who was asked by Ahab, the king of the north, “Will you join me to fight Ramoth-gilead?” Jehoshaphat asked if he had prophetic sanction, and Ahab said, “Yes, I have lots of prophets.” So the prophets were asked, “Should we fight, and will we win?” They went into their ancient dance routine, and replied, “Yes. Fight, and Israel will win.” But Jehoshaphat asked, “Do we have a prophet of the Lord here?” Ahab responded, “Yes, but he never prophesies good for me.” “Get him,” says Jehoshaphat. So enters Macaiah Ben-Imlah. To the question, “Will we win this war,” this prophet goes through the same gyrations as the false prophets, and says, “Yes, you will.” But Jehoshaphat says, “No, no, we want the truth.” “Oh, so you want the truth,” says the prophet, “that’s a different story! If you go to battle, you will be dispersed among the peoples of your enemies.” What is the point? You can make the Bible say anything you want it to say. I have heard people justify all kinds of wrong behavior through this book, but if you trace the theology of the godly, there is very little deviation in interpretation.

The only prerequisite to entering on this course is a listening ear and an obedient heart.

Everything is in place to disciple you. The text has been written, the Teacher is waiting. The only reason you haven’t taken up the offer lies with your unwillingness to be attentive and obey.

IV. The curriculum of the school: A willingness to face rejection

**I was not disobedient,
Nor did I turn back.
I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard.
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. (Isa 50:5-6)**

There is good news and bad news about the curriculum. The good news is that there is only one course to it; the bad news is, you’re not going to like it. The curriculum which Jesus had to face while he was on earth was rejection.

A. Rejection by his own flesh

The Servant’s rejection began with the leaders of the nation, then it extended to his relatives, to his brothers, and even to his mother. In a few weeks we will celebrate the events of Christmas—the manger scene, the shepherds, the wise men, etc, but at the time of Jesus’ birth, the people of Bethlehem were not thinking of such quaint scenes, they were remembering a bloodbath, because Herod slaughtered every male infant under two years old:

**Herod...slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under... Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying,
“A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she refused to be comforted,
Because they were no more.” (Matt 2:16-18)**

When Jesus began ministering, Mark tells us, “He came home, and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. And when His own kinsmen heard of this, they

went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘He has lost His senses.’” (Mark 3:21).

Closer to home, here is what his own brothers said of him, “His brothers therefore said to him, ‘Depart from here, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.’ For not even His brothers were believing in Him” (John 7:3-5).

But what about Mom? There’s always Mom, even when others reject you. Isn’t that so? But Jesus had to even rebuke his mother at the wedding at Cana, when she tried to manipulate him. “Woman, what do I have to do with you?” he asked. He did what he did not because she asked him to, but because he was Messiah. The psalmist says,

**For Thy sake I have borne reproach;
Dishonor has covered my face.
I have become estranged from my brothers,
And an alien to my mother’s sons. (Ps 69:7-8)**

I think the most extreme statement in Scripture of the alienation of the Servant is in Matthew 8:20: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

Why all this rejection? It is because Israel could not be affirmed in the flesh. Flesh cannot recognize spirit. Jesus came to give birth to a people born of Spirit, Jews and Gentiles alike, but fleshly Israel could not see that, so they rejected him

B. His willingness to submit to it

Jesus was willing to submit to rejection because he knew it was designed by God to enhance his ministry. This is why he says,

**I was not disobedient,
Nor did I turn back.
I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard.
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.**

Here we see the full magnitude of Jesus’ education. God opened his ear to equip his tongue to speak. Then he submits his back, cheeks and face to utter rejection. “To strike on the cheek and the face signifies that one is so defenseless that he can not even protect his face from the blows of an enemy and so is humiliated by him” (Bruce Waltke).

The apostle Paul would agree that this is the mark of a truly educated man in the school of discipleship. It is not circumcision, or degrees; it is whether he carries on his back the brand marks of suffering for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

C. Rejection enhances his education

Far from rendering him dysfunctional, this rejection enhances the ministry of the Servant. This is why he can hear the weary, and why he can speak a word to encourage them—because he himself suffered rejection. What we learn here is that part of the curriculum of learning “to answer the weary one with a word” is to face rejection of others. May we see our suffering in a similar light! Rejection lifts an earthly barrier and opens the window to heaven: we have an ear to hear God. This works in the heart so that we can speak gentle speech to the hurting, broken and needy souls all around us.

Implications for ministry

A. Have we entered this school of discipleship?

Think of all that is available to us in this school! It should overwhelm us with awe and praise, that the same relationship the Father had with Jesus is available to us! He wants to rouse us each and every morning, and throughout the day to speak to us personally through his word. With the word deep in the heart he will burden us to speak to the weary ones, and give them refreshment from his heavenly waters. The questions are, Are we available? Will we be attentive? Will we obey? Lord, do to us what you did to the deaf mute. Open our ears that we might hear you above all others.

B. How have we responded to rejection?

If the Lord was rejected, so will we be, for the slave is not above his master. Will we be like Christ, and allow the rejection of others to magnify our ministry by drawing us nearer to God, or will we become bitter? May God use rejection in our lives to equip us to speak to the weary.

To illustrate the gentleness of our teacher, let me share with you a poem I just received from Bucharest, written by Traian Dorz. This man faced 16 years of rejection in prison, but found that to be the true school of disciples.

How Quiet Are Your Steps
By Traian Dorz

How quiet are Your steps,
When You let down in me;
With a myriad ways
You surround my being with love.

As the walking of the stars on the sky,
Like the moon rise
Like a boat travelling through
The sea of my prayers,
Like the spring of the drops
From the deep toward the waves
So is the mystery of grace
When it touches my soul.

Like dew of the serene sky
On the bowing grass,
Like evening that is wrapping
The stone still forest.
Like the sweet breeze whispering
Among the blooming ears.
Like the peace of the great silence
On the sunny peaks
Like the peaceful sun's murmur
Of the spring.
Like the holy thrill
From the Easter night
Like the sweat fire of love
To the treasure of the heart

How quiet are Your steps
When you let down in me.

© 1990 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino