

# A TEACHER FOR TURBULENT TIMES

by Doug Goins

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The passage we are going to study this morning deals with the question of wisdom: where to find wise men and wise women.

I read a book twelve years ago by business consultant Peter Drucker entitled *Managing in Turbulent Times*. As I was working on this series, I recalled this issue of turbulence in different spheres of life and how the Lord Jesus as Messiah enters into the turbulence and brings stability. This book, written in 1980, was Drucker's prophecy, his forecast or predictive analysis of the global business climate in the 1980's and 1990's. He called those next twenty years a time of historically choppy air, and said it would be an increasingly unpredictable period, where people would need to be prepared for surprises.

Drucker was writing to business executives, and the issues for them were helping their companies survive, managing resources, and meeting emergencies. In his book, he said that if these leaders were going to survive, they had to analyze very perceptively and clearly as they faced the future. He asked hard questions about the kind of men and women in leadership that would be needed by these businesses to keep them strong and healthy.

In the last twelve years his prophetic words have come true. If you look at the global business and economic climates, increasingly they are in turmoil all around our world, and the world is desperately looking for leaders who can bring health and stability to these areas. The question is, who can calm the turbulence of economic choppy air?

This week, while I was studying the passage of Scripture before us this morning, I reflected on the issue of spiritual leadership. Where can we find men and women who can bring not fiscal but spiritual stability into our individual homes, into our church family, into the communities in which we live?

As we look for answers to that question of spiritual leadership, we hear religious spokespeople for all kinds of religious empires, for megachurches around the country, for parachurch organizations. There are many articles and books about effective fundraising in the church, about program promotion, about how to be more entertaining and more "user friendly". I see religious leaders defining all kinds of rules and structures and formulas. I hear many simplistic answers and fail-safe formulas about how we can speak clearly to this generation. But I am sincerely burdened as we face 1993 because I hear so few people who clearly bring a word from God, who bring a message that resonates in your heart and lets you know that the Lord is communicating through these individuals as writers or speakers.

My dad has served as a hospital chaplain and has trained pastors for chaplaincy work. I remember him telling me a couple of years ago of the privilege he has of visiting hospital patients. He said, "Whenever you enter a hospital room to visit a patient you bring a word of grace; you bring a message from the Lord."

I think that word, which is marked with frightening responsibility, can be enlarged. When we enter turbulent times we must bring a word of grace, a word from God. It is required of every single one of us. Living now in the increasing spiritual turbulence of the 1990's, we are called to speak words of life and truth. We are called not just to speak but to communicate with our lives, to authenticate the words that we speak by the consistent lifestyle we live out in submission to Jesus, the perfect Teacher. Jesus said to his disciples that they (and we) must be able to discern the times, to figure out what's going on around us and then speak appropriately in response.

Writing to Christians in first-century Turkey, the apostle Peter talked about that same needed stability and consistency when he wrote, "...gird up your minds and be sober...." (I Peter 1:13). As God's people we are called to give a sense of direction, to model spiritual stability to people all around us.

I saw a one-box cartoon a few weeks ago that was empty except for a man and woman spinning upside down through space. The man says to the woman, "Gertrude, we have to stop living like this." Well, we're surrounded by folks like that who are falling out of control and have no idea how to get out of the dive that they're in.

Living in the seventh century before Christ, the prophet Isaiah was a man who lived out truth consistently before his generation, and who spoke the truth to people whose lives were spinning out of control. Isaiah always clearly spoke the word of God, and he lived in full obedience to the God who sent him, taught him, and gave him the word to speak.

Truth-telling was not easy for Isaiah. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish scholar who wrote a book titled *The Prophets*, says of Isaiah and his commitment to teach and to live truth:

"The prophet was an individual who said no to his society, condemning its habits and assumptions, its complacency, its waywardness, its syncretism. He was often compelled to proclaim the very opposite of what his heart expected. His fundamental objective was to reconcile man to God. Why did the two need reconciliation? Perhaps it is due to man's false sense of sovereignty, to his abuse of freedom, to his aggressive, sprawling pride, resenting God's involvement in history."

In a series of prophetic messianic songs Isaiah introduces to us One who is to come, One who will provide the solution to man's stubborn, prideful resistance to God's sovereignty, One we have been studying together this month whom Isaiah calls the Servant of the Lord.

These four servant songs we are studying weave a beautiful tapestry of the ever-growing revelation of God's love. Isaiah defines the Servant of Jehovah as the One who demonstrates and brings God's love to people.

Three weeks ago we were introduced to this One as being sent from God to lead us with tender strength as a shepherd (Isaiah 40). Two weeks ago He was pictured as a servant who ministers compassion (Isaiah 42). Last week we learned that he is One who can reconcile us to God, who can free us from bondage to sin and guilt, who can give us victory over Satanic opposition as the Savior of the world (Isaiah 49).

Today in chapter 50 of Isaiah the figure of Christ is going to step off the page and fill the room with his beauty. In this chapter we are introduced to the perfect Teacher, sent by a sovereign Lord, who is the full and complete solution to humanity's ignorant, arrogant impotence. We think we are so powerful, but in reality we are helpless to do anything about the problems with which we struggle. But this Teacher has ultimate answers for ultimate questions. In verse 4 Jesus the Teacher, the Servant himself, speaks:

The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue,  
to know the word that sustains the weary.  
He wakens me morning by morning,  
wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

Then in verse 10 God is speaking about the Servant, and he speaks to us directly:

Who among you fears the LORD  
and obeys the word of his servant?  
Let him who walks in the dark,  
who has no light,  
trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

In verses 4 through 9 we see that the Servant speaks on his own behalf about his ministry. Then in the last two verses, 10 and 11, the Lord who sent the Servant to teach speaks. I think that these verses answer a couple of

questions. First, why should we listen to this Teacher? Why should we submit to his authority? There are many good teachers around with many different solutions. What makes this Teacher unique? Second, what response does this Teacher require from us? If we're going to submit ourselves to him, putting ourselves under his authority, what does he want from us in response? Listen to what the Lord Jesus says about himself, in verses 4-9:

The Lord God has given me  
the tongue of those who are taught,  
that I may know how to sustain with a word  
him that is weary.

Morning by morning he wakens,  
he wakens my ear  
to hear as those who are taught.

The Lord God has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious,  
I turned not backward.

I gave my back to the smiters,  
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;  
I hid not my face  
from shame and spitting.

For the Lord God helps me;  
therefore I have not been confounded;  
therefore I have set my face like a flint,  
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;  
he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?  
Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary?  
Let him come near to me.

Behold, the Lord God helps me;  
who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;  
the moth will eat them up.

Four things come out of that paragraph that commend to us Jesus' credibility and authority: his tongue, his ear, his will (the obedience that he evidenced), and finally the power and resources that he drew on as a teacher.

First of all, look at the kind of tongue he has, the kind of words he speaks and the effect those words have on people. Look at the beginning of verse 4 again.

"The Lord God has given me  
the tongue of those who are taught,  
that I may know how to sustain with a word  
him that is weary."

Various English translations of the Bible interpret that little phrase "the tongue of those that are taught" very

differently. In the New International Version it is "an instructed tongue." The New English Bible translates it "the tongue of a teacher." The New American Standard calls it "the tongue of a disciple." King James says, "the tongue of the learned." The Hebrew word "lamad" really is that rich and all these interpretations help us to understand the fullness of the kind of tongue with which Jesus spoke. That Hebrew word suggests speech that has become a part of the nature of the one speaking. It suggests disciplined learning, not a haphazard experience. The Teacher didn't make it up as he went along. He had learned God's word, and it flowed out of his life. It suggests that truth had been internalized, and as a result his speech was very penetrating. It affected people very directly, and the hearts of his hearers were opened.

If you look at the verse closely, it implies that Jesus' words were this effective in part because he never forgot that he was a learner as well as a teacher. He never quit learning from his heavenly Father as he shared life-changing truth with people.

And the words that Jesus spoke always had an effect. Yes, he was a master communicator, but it didn't stop at entertainment for entertainment's sake. When people listened to Jesus Christ they were never bored, but they were not just dazzled with his story-telling ability. He never left people cold and unaffected by the words that he spoke. Jesus still speaks powerfully today through the Scriptures, and if we listen to him we will be affected just as directly as those first-century hearers were.

These words of Jesus were spoken to people who were weary and spiritually bankrupt, people who recognized their deep need. Remember Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Jesus spoke with purpose and wanted to bring refreshment to people who were at their wit's end. Jesus' word is sustenance: literally, it means to answer us when we're struggling with questions. There is not one question of the human heart that Jesus cannot respond to, minister directly to, and answer with his sustaining words.

Another reason his words were so effective is that they were totally controlled by the Lord God, the one who had given him this kind of tongue, the source of the words. God was the ultimate authority behind those words, and God was the one Jesus always listened to.

That brings us to the middle of verse 4. It talks about the kind of ear that Jesus had. He says:

"Morning by morning [the Lord God] wakens,  
he wakens my ear  
to hear as those who are taught.  
The Lord God has opened my ear."

Learning requires listening; it requires submissive attention to the source of wisdom. Before Jesus had anything to say, he had to listen. Verse 4 says that his Father God was his teacher, like a personal mentor or tutor. Morning by morning, he says, he was taught. That little phrase implies learning by repetition. The fact that it was first thing in the morning implies that it was first priority for the Lord Jesus to learn from his Father, and that it was repetitive. It was done in seclusion. Remember all the times in the gospels that Jesus would separate himself from the disciples to be alone with his heavenly Father, to talk with him and to listen to him.

It also meant he had to study the Bible. How did Jesus learn? Wasn't he omniscient? No, he gave all that up when he came to earth to share a common humanity. He had to study just like we do. And he pored over the Old Testament Scriptures, always asking God to open them up to him. Increasingly, Jesus saw himself more and more in those Scriptures as he studied: his identity, his calling, his work, his mission, the message he was supposed to bring. God unfolded these things to him as he spent years (thirty) in preparation before God could use him as a spokesperson.

Jesus said, "I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak" [John 12:49]. "I don't say anything," Jesus claimed over and over again, "as coming from myself. I speak what God tells me to speak, what God has taught me." Jesus had

the ear of a learner, a listener. He was teachable. He was willing to be submissive to the teacher, talking with his Father.

The second half of verse 5 may seem a bit surprising because Isaiah has moved from the Teacher's tongue to his ear, and our logic might suggest that he has been taught and prepared to speak so now he can speak. But Isaiah moves next to the place of suffering in the life of the Teacher, and his willingness to submit to the suffering in obedience to his heavenly Father.

We tend to focus on hearing truth, and then thinking about truth, and then telling the truth to somebody else. But it was required of Jesus--the perfect Teacher, the perfect Communicator--that his lifestyle had to authenticate the truth that he spoke. Verses 5 and 6 speak of the will that was submitted to the Father. Jesus says:

"I was not rebellious,  
I turned not backward.  
I gave my back to the smiters,  
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;  
I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

In verses 4, 5 and 6, there is a logical progression of hearing truth, of doing truth, being obedient to the truth he knew, and then having the right to speak truth. It all flowed together.

This is the same logical progression experienced by Ezra the scribe, who ministered to the nation of Israel after its return from the exile in Babylon. In the book of Ezra, he is described this way: As a teacher of the nation, "Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do [the law of God], and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). Studying truth, doing truth, and then--and only then--having the right to teach truth.

Jesus was obedient to the will of his Father. He was willing to submit to rejection, to physical abuse, to pain, to psychological humiliation, to torment, to the torture of being beaten and of having his beard pulled out one hair at a time. He says, "I didn't turn away from the mental and emotional abuse, the verbal insults, the humiliation of being spat on. I didn't turn my face aside. I allowed them to take their best shot, to spit in my face."

Jesus could endure all these sufferings because he knew they were designed by God to enhance his ministry of reconciliation. His obedience to the will of the Father, his willingness to suffer, did not turn him into some kind of dysfunctional cripple. That is our fear of suffering, and we see many twisted, warped people whose view of reality is not clear or focused, who don't speak clearly about reality, because of the pain and suffering they have been through.

And we might logically think that somehow Jesus would be disqualified because of the suffering that he went through, but in reality just the opposite is true: It gives him absolute credibility. He is a Teacher who can be trusted to know what he's talking about, who can empathize with human pain and suffering, who can speak with authority on the human condition. His suffering enabled him to identify with us in all the suffering we experience because of sinful pride and rebellion, whether it is our own or we are the victim of somebody else.

The next three verses, 7, 8 and 9, speak of the resources on which the Teacher relied, the power source for his lifestyle and his words, the life-giving truth that he spoke. Verse 7 says,

"For the Lord God helps me."

The word "for" may be "because" in your Bible, and it is tied to verse 6: that was how he could endure suffering,

"...the Lord God helps me;  
therefore I have not been confounded;  
therefore I have set my face like a flint,  
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;  
he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?  
Let us stand up together.  
Who is my adversary?  
Let him come near to me.

Behold, the Lord God helps me;  
who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;  
the moth will eat them up."

Three things come out of these verses. The person of God was the resource on which he drew, the power of God at work was what he trusted in, and the presence of God with him is what he relied on.

There is a name for God that is used four times in that paragraph. It is the two words "Lord God" in verses 4, 5, 7 and 9. In Hebrew it is the two names Yahweh and Adonai. Yahweh is the covenant name of God, the self-contained God who has power over all creation. Adonai is a much less common name for God in the Old Testament. It is the name for God that carries the idea of the most supreme authority or supreme ownership. It is used in the Bible only when the utmost reverence is to be expressed. The reason Jesus was not afraid, the reason he was able to live and speak boldly is that he knew that Yahweh God, the God of the universe, the one to be revered, was totally trustworthy and could be counted on.

And he would be powerfully active in the life of Jesus. Look at all the things that Jesus is convinced God will do for him. He knows that God will help him, that God will vindicate him, that God will exonerate his name and save his reputation, that God will triumph over evil which opposes his mission and the message of life that he is committed to bringing to people. Nothing can stop that mission because God is at work in his life.

Notice that every verse begins in the present tense. He is not hoping that somehow, way off in the distant future, God will come to his rescue and bail him out. Even in the midst of difficulty, God is presently active and powerful. Verse 7, "For the Lord God helps me," is present tense. Verse 8, "He who vindicates me is near," is right now. Verse 9, "Behold, the Lord God helps me," again is present tense. Jesus was confident not in himself, his intellect, or his ability to speak clearly or to hold the attention of audiences; he was totally confident in the power of God to be at work through him, to capture people's minds and emotions and wills. He had every confidence in that.

In these verses, 4 through 9, Jesus has spoken about his own attributes and his own characteristics which give him credibility and authenticate him as a teacher: his tongue, his ear, his obedience, the powerful divine resources he draws on from his heavenly Father.

In two verses, one of the New Testament writers pulled all those characteristics together and summarized the credibility and authority of Jesus. Look at the New Testament letter to the Hebrews. In Hebrews 5:5, God said to Jesus, "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee." This verse refers to Jesus' incarnation. That is what happened on Christmas night when Jesus was born to be a man, to live among us.

Now look at Hebrews 5:7. The writer says, "In the days of his earthly life [Jesus' 33 years on earth], Jesus offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears, to God who is able to deliver Him from the grave. Because of his humble submission His prayers were heard. Son though he was he learned obedience in the school of suffering. And once perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." There was a process of preparation that Jesus went through, learning through suffering, obedience, and

humility. In the New English Bible, which I have quoted here, the writer calls it a school of suffering and ties together this issue of salvation in Christ and obedience "for all who obey him."

The last two verses in Isaiah 50, 10 and 11, address that relationship between salvation in Jesus and the obedience that flows out of it. In verse 10 God is speaking, and he begins with a question:

Who among you fears the Lord  
and obeys the voice of his servant,  
who walks in darkness and has no light,  
yet trusts in the name of the Lord  
and relies upon his God?

Behold, all you who kindle a fire,  
who set brands alight!  
Walk by the light of your fire,  
and by the brands which you have kindled!  
This shall you have from my hand:  
you shall lie down in torment.

The question that begins that paragraph is addressed directly to every one of us here this morning. If you look carefully at verses 10 and 11, humanity is divided into only two groups: not religious and irreligious, or good and bad, or Republican and Democrat, or naughty and nice. It is not that kind of division. The two groups are those who obey Jesus the Teacher, and those who oppose Jesus the Teacher. There is no middle ground or neutral zone that you can float in.

Verse 10 speaks to believers and is wonderfully encouraging if you're a disciple of Jesus. Verse 11 is a frightening warning for those who choose to disobey the Servant sent from God. Every one of us is called to absolute obedience to the voice of the Servant. The only way to have a relationship with God is through the Messiah. We can't claim to know God or to revere him as Lord unless we submit to the voice of his Servant.

The heart of that issue is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and as Lord. Remember, Jesus asked the question of people who were following him and believing that they were part of his group, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you?" [Luke 6:46]. He asked, Why do you claim loyalty and fidelity to me, and yet live a life that does not conform to the truth that I give you?

In Matthew 17, God speaks audibly on the Mount of Transfiguration and says of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased...." God is delighted in the life and message of his Son. Then he gives an imperative: "Listen to him," [17:5] and by implication, "and do what he tells you to do." In the Scriptures, hearing truth is always linked to doing truth. We never have the privilege of just hearing, like a dilettante, what Jesus has to say. There comes with hearing a responsibility to follow through, to respond to the truth that we're presented with. It says in verse 10 that we are called to walk in obedience even when we can't see where we are going, when it seems that we are walking in the dark, without support or illumination.

The Lord Jesus had to go through that kind of darkness. When he was hanging on the cross and the earth became dark for three hours Jesus cried out with a cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was alone there without support. But even as the darkness of death was descending on him as he hung on the cross, he was able to cry out, "It is finished," confessing his confidence that God would complete the work of salvation that was begun at the cross. He died with confidence that God would be true to his character and his name, an ever-present help in time of trouble.

Part of our obedience is to follow Jesus when the consequences are personally painful for us, when we must endure a sense of loss or a denial of our desires, or we feel that we are in the dark, and we're not sure where the next step is going to take us.

Over the years I've had many conversations with men and women about issues like that, the pain of following

Jesus and doing what he asks us to do. Sometimes it affects a vocation, sometimes relationships or finances or sexuality or family relationships. I've had a recurring conversation with a number of young men and women who are followers of Jesus Christ, who want to live lives in obedience to him, but who are struggling with whether or not they should marry a non-Christian. On this issue, the Teacher speaks very clearly and unequivocally: "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." [2 Corinthians 6:14] Yet it is a difficult choice when a delightful young man has asked you to marry him, but he doesn't love the Lord, and to say no to him means that you may have to live the rest of your life without a husband. It is difficult to follow Jesus obediently in that darkness, to walk by faith and not by sight.

The ultimate issue is reliance on God to fulfill us, and sometimes living and walking that way is painful and difficult. It can seem like a long dark tunnel at times. But look at the alternative listed in verse 11 as a warning to the disobedient. It is possible to light our own way with flaming torches so that we can do what we want to do, and make our own rules because we're not comfortable with the darkness that we feel we are living in. The result clearly is death. If you look carefully at verse 11, God even takes personal responsibility for the torment which will result. God is not vengeful or vindictive. But he is a realist. God is saying that if you turn to a solution or a choice which violates the word of the Servant that he has clearly spoken through the Scriptures, if you try to work it out on your own and ignore the voice of the Teacher, then you will have to live with the inevitable results. You will be miserable, restless, unhappy, in torment. The natural consequence of your choices will be hell on earth. Methodist missionary evangelist E. Stanley Jones used to say, "God always gives us the right of choice-making, but never the right of consequence-choosing."

We have a choice to respond to the perfect Teacher, the Servant of the Lord, and to live a life in obedience to him. And there's great news about what will result from that kind of choice for us. As Isaiah 53 finishes the servant songs, you see the full picture of Jesus' work on the cross and the wonderful life that he offers us. Chapter 54 is a great hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the work of the Servant, for all the incredible things God is going to do for us because of this obedient Servant, the Son Jesus. Look at the promise in Isaiah 54:13-14:

All your sons shall be taught  
[the word taught is *lamad*];  
you'll be taught, disciplined, and given wisdom by the Lord  
and great shall be the prosperity [spiritual blessing] of your sons.  
In righteousness you shall be established...

Literally, you will be stabilized in righteousness if you make the choice to be obedient to the Servant, the Teacher.

If we're taught by God, if we become students, and if we're willing to go through the school of suffering, we'll be given everything in relationship to God that Jesus had. We'll be given the same kind of tongue that can bring encouragement and strength and correction and help to people. We'll be given the same kind of ear to be attentive and submissive to truth, to want to be fed through the word of God. We'll be given the same will that Jesus had, the same submission, the same humility, the same willingness to suffer for the sake of righteousness and for the sake of other people. We'll be given the same divine resources, the power of God resident and at work within us. He'll minister to us in all the same ways that he did to the Lord Jesus, if we choose to obey the voice of the Servant.

That is incredible! It is overwhelming that we can have the same effectiveness in life that Jesus had wherever he went, wherever he spoke, wherever he cared for people; and that promise of being spiritually blessed, of knowing prosperity, being stabilized in righteousness, that addresses the concerns that I began with this morning. Where will we find men and women to bring stabilizing spiritual leadership to our families, to our church, to our communities? From individuals who can speak a word from God to men and women spinning out of control all around them, who are obedient followers of the Servant of the Lord, who are completely sold on the truth of the Scriptures, who are willing to tell the truth no matter what.

In a cartoon I saw recently, a bailiff was swearing in a witness at a trial. He said, "Are you willing to tell the



truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, even if the timing is not right?" That is the kind of people we're called to be, just like Jesus was.

The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue,  
to know the word that sustains the weary.  
Who among you fears the Lord  
and obeys the word of his servant...

We are spiritual sons and daughters of Jesus Christ. He is the only source of authority. There are many people who try to tell you the truth, or who purport to tell the truth. But we are called to be people who speak accurately and exactly the truth of Jesus.

So the questions confront each one of us this morning. First of all, are we willing to be obedient? Maybe you've never surrendered yourself to that Teacher. Today could be the day that you do that, and say yes, I want words of life in me, and then I will be willing to share them with other people.

Are we attentive and teachable and moldable people in our submission to the word of God? It is a tragedy when people come to us and ask for spiritual counsel and we have nothing to tell them because we don't know our Bibles. That's embarrassing. And yet the promise is that we'll be taught by the Teacher, if we will take the time and expend the energy to learn. Jesus had to work hard to learn truth, and we will have to work just as hard. And prayer is an important part of that. "Lord, teach me. Open up the Scriptures to me." This church provides lots of opportunities for that, through home fellowships, through home Bible studies, Sunday School classes, Discovery Seminars, the pulpit here on Sunday morning. We are unashamedly a message-driven church because it is only the word of God that changes lives, and nothing else. When you come to church on Sunday, or you go to Bible studies, I hope that you come teachable and attentive and excited. I hope you come with anticipation about how the Teacher is going to teach you when you show up, through the Scriptures. Let us appropriate the boldness of Christ to tell the world the truth, as we enter 1993.

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Doug Goins  
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