

# Teaching Perils

James 3: 1-12 Isaiah 50: 4-9 Pastor Lentz  
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When I became a teaching elder I had no idea about the perils of teaching. I was so focused upon what good I could bring and what power the Bible gives us and how wonderful the text is that I just didn't really pay very much attention to the perils of teaching. I was so caught up in just wanting to do it well, that perils never crossed my mind. If I had read these passages understanding them the way I do today, I would have known. I could then have been prepared for the unpleasantness of teaching and the predictable attacks.

You see a long time ago ministers were taught that this passage in Isaiah was referring to Jesus, and so folks didn't look beyond that narrow perspective. Today a more enlightened approach recognizes that this passage in Isaiah is referring to you the reader. That is right it is not only referring to Isaiah, as well as Jesus but also to you and your great grandchildren as well.

James more recognizes that teaching is something that everyone can and will do but he is cautioning you to realize there are perils to teaching and you will be held to a higher standard if you do.

Considering how we operate it would be more accurate to say when you do, than if. The reason is that all of us teach. We may not all have classrooms. We may not all recognize that we are teachers but we are. When we tell others things they didn't ask to know. We are teaching. When we demonstrate who we are we are teaching. The truth is we are teaching a lot. We may not all go to great lengths to teach but there are positives and negatives to teaching and it is right for us to acknowledge them.

I find this whole sermon to be ironic in that I just returned from Teaching in France, and am teaching in this sermon, knowing perfectly

well that to teach also means that some will attack me and I will likely want or need to turn to God for comfort, just for doing what I believe that I was called to do.

Moses, Isaiah, Jesus and every other teacher including you has suffered from being a teacher. It simply goes with the territory. I know that now and realize that is simply a fact of life.

You have knowledge. You have wisdom and you know that you know some things that will and do help others to know. The trouble is that when you teach them the response isn't always one of appreciation for your wisdom. Some of the time you are mistreated, some of the time you are spoken badly about and some of the time you will if you haven't already felt overwhelmed by the negative response to what you hoped would be appreciation for your offering your wisdom.

Let's face it. Not all teaching is appreciated. In fact, there are some predictable times when it will not be appreciated. Jewish tradition discourages us from teaching when we know that the other person doesn't want or will reject our teaching. It was attempting to protect us from the predicable response to teaching when the message is unwanted.

Now let's also be clear that teachers have been the most important people in my life. There were grade school teachers, kindergarten teachers, high school teachers, college and seminary teachers who have helped to change my life in positive ways. There have been dozens of other teachers who didn't have classrooms who also changed my life. There continues to be people who teach me in all sorts of ways that I am deeply indebted to. At almost any time of my life I can point to a teacher who made a major difference. I have a profound appreciation for teachers.

The truth is that you teach me as well. Your response to sermons, your response to the things I say in the sermons and the way I understand the Bible teach me all the time. I am deeply appreciative to you for your response and your teaching.

No matter how much it is that I appreciate your wisdom and what you teach me sooner or later you are likely to feel as Isaiah has stated and need and want God's protection. It may happen in some direct way that my response to you isn't what you hoped for, or it may come in a much more indirect way such as your becoming demoralized and wonder what the point in teaching is anyway, but it is likely to happen sooner or later. It isn't always positive and teachers do not always feel appreciated even if they are by the people who they teach.

I deeply appreciate all the people who have taught me, and continue to teach me but my feelings may nor may not have anything to do with your reaction to or understanding of what I do with your teaching. You may or may not know how appreciative I am unless I tell you, because our facial expressions do not always communicate what we really believe and feel. Every test on facial expressions concludes that we only get hunches not actual facts about what others feel. Our beliefs about how others feel probably has as much to do with what we interpret their feelings as anything else.

The wisdom of this passage and how it offers us the recognition that the feeling of being attacked is likely to happen and here is a way to minimize it when it does happen.

Neither I nor this passage are just referring to the times that you teach someone who hasn't asked to be taught. We all know that those times are going to bring us unpleasant responses. We all know that telling someone who hasn't asked for our wisdom is a thankless job, and that no good deed will go unpunished. Those times are simply to be expected. When any of us offer our wisdom to someone who isn't ready to hear it they are very likely to reject it and us for offering it. It doesn't make sense to us when we only wanted to help. We know what we know and we know that our wisdom will help. We can also be wiser and wait until we are asked because that is a dangerous enough time. We make jokes about answering others when they ask, "Does this outfit make me look ....."?

We have all dealt with that type of question. On the one hand we have felt as if no matter what we say it will be wrong. Notice that the Isaiah passage also suggests that we discover how God can help us. It is about our willingness to discover how God wants us to answer those types of questions. Not just some formula but in each case, what is the right thing to do. That keeps us in touch with God as the passage implies. The way it has worked for me is that when I have some urge to teach someone something that when I pray and ask whether I should or not, I am in a lot safer position. Sometimes God tells me no and when I am really healthy I simply take it to be the answer. However when I am not as healthy as I would like I want to say, "But wait a minute, God it will help them a lot." I can almost see God smile and say go ahead you won't like the response and I know that if I did neither would the person get the message nor would I feel better after.

Have you noticed how differently you feel when you teach something that the person really wanted to learn? It is wonderful. When they don't really want to learn what you are going to teach them because it will alter their ego, or distort how they believe the world exists they will either not pay any attention or it will be a riveting piece of information. So I am going to attempt to do what I have been talking about. I will tell you about an experience I had while away. I went to a holocaust museum. In all fairness, I have been to them in Los Angeles, Washington D.C. Budapest Hungary, Luxemburg, Berlin, and a few other places. If they addressed the reason for the Holocaust at all it has been answers that were vague. Reasons like the economics of the times, German need, Hitler's ability with words, etc. The museum in Budapest had a picture of the Cardinal who signed the papers allowing the Nazi's to round up and then kill Budapest's Jews, but it didn't give any reason for the Holocaust. They wanted everyone to know the man and his family name who had betrayed Budapest's Jews. It was an emotionally powerful exhibit, but it had no real cause that explained how come the Holocaust happened. It implied greed, but that doesn't really answer the question. The museum in Los Angeles, talks about

human disrespect toward others. But none gave any real answer to the question. However, the Imperial War Memorial in London England did something different. So after visiting WW I and WWII types of exhibits that seemed factual, and determined to paint an accurate picture, of those wars, seeing their Holocaust exhibit was also on the agenda. It had the typical pictures, along with personalized accounts of people who had survived concentration camps. However the museum had an answer to how come the Holocaust occurred. What the exhibit said, was the reason for the Holocaust was 2,000 years of Anti-Semitic preaching and teaching from Christians. It didn't beat around the bush, it simply stated what they believed as fact. It hit me in the face and stomach as true. If it is true then we all may want to ask how come. It doesn't really make any sense, for Christians to be Anti-Semitic. So how come the Church would have done that and how come so much of the Church didn't speak up when they saw it happen. One thing I am proud of is that only once in my adult life have I ever heard anyone being openly Anti-Semitic, and that man knew I didn't agree with him. If Isaiah is correct, then some will be appreciative for what I have taught today, and some might not be as positive. I trust you because I know your heart and believe in you. You know and respect the fact that Jesus was a Jew, and show that respect in obvious ways. It is my hope that this experience will also teach both you and me the deeper meaning in these passages about teaching. Amen.