

A Sermon  
Rev. W. Kevin Holder  
Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
May 12, 2019

## **Taught Ones**

Isaiah 54:1-17

Tassel toppers are popular items this time of the year. They're a great way to decorate your graduation cap, to stand out, and to send a message. Scan the rows of graduates, and on top of their heads you'll see quotations like: "I never dreamed about success. I worked for it." "The next chapter begins." "The best is yet to come." "Achievement unlocked." And for those facing huge student debt: "Game of Loans: Interest coming."

Many tassel toppers aim to express the graduate's gratitude to others, especially parents. One photo displays a pair of students sitting side by side. One wears a cap that reads: "Thank you dad! And Google." The other wears a cap that says: "Thank you mom. And spellcheck."

While Father's Day is still a little bit down the road, it's interesting to see how the convergence of Mother's Day and commencement season makes for some interesting moments, and some clever marketing. There's seemingly no limit to the ways you can blend gratitude to mom with congratulations to the graduate. In fact, many colleges and universities hold their graduation ceremonies on Mother's Day.

This is partly a reminder that long before a student hears their name announced, walks across the stage, and shakes the hands of school officials, they've been enrolled, for years, in another institution of learning called home. Parents have been their primary instructors. Granted, others have been involved in their training. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other extended family. Friends and neighbors. Religious leaders and other figures in the community. But from day to day, on the front lines of a child's training, have been mom or dad, or hopefully both.

One woman tells about how she and her husband had educated their two oldest children in public school, and decided to homeschool their youngest, named Lauren. When Lauren asked when she would start school, she was told that it would be at least another year. At that time, Mommy would be her teacher. With a worried look, Lauren cried out, "No, no, you can't do that! Who'll be my Mommy then?"<sup>1</sup>

In many ways, being mom and being teacher go together. The language of motherhood is the language of life, the language of learning. There's certainly plenty of both in today's Scripture passage from Isaiah. Our text opens with a call to break the silence of sorrow with a song of celebration. The city of Jerusalem is pictured as a woman unable to have children. Here Isaiah is drawing on an ancient motif, the barren matriarch. One of the best known examples is Sarah, to whom God promised a child. Isaiah may even have Sarah in mind here at the beginning of our text. But whatever the details of Isaiah's thinking, the point is that God will take the sorrow and suffering of Jerusalem and turn it into a vibrant city. God's exiled people will be forgiven and restored. The God of Israel has the power to deliver and to multiply, to take desolation and turn it into abundance.

This is the God who brings life out of death, the God who raised Jesus from the dead. True, Easter Sunday is now in our rearview mirror, but its implications are always right in front of

us. The God who redeemed and restored his exiled people Israel provided, through his people, a Savior, who lives and reigns as Lord. In Jesus himself all God's promises of forgiveness and new life are fulfilled.

In today's Scripture passage from John, Jesus picks up on some of Isaiah's message. Jesus is talking with the crowds about how people come to know him because God takes the initiative and draws them. And because God draws them, they experience the power and the promise of the resurrection. Jesus says, "No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God'" (6:44-45). Here Jesus is appealing to Isaiah 54:13: "All your children will be taught by the Lord, and great will be their peace."

Isaiah was talking about how God would restore the fortune of his people, pictured here as children, the children of Jerusalem. God had brought up his children, but they had rebelled against him. In the process, they had to endure harsh circumstances and difficult times. But God would still deal with them not only in judgment but also in gracious healing and protection. He would mercifully enable his people to know him again, the way that they're meant to know him. In this case, they're described as those who will be "taught by God."

"Taught by God" means God's teaching and instruction for his people. It means God's word. It means God addressing his people and speaking to them. Not simply so that they'll be able to receive, analyze, and process a body of information about God, but so that, most of all, they'll know God, in a life-giving, transforming relationship. In other words, these "taught ones" are supposed to be getting more than just a diploma in theology. They're supposed to be living in right relationship with the God who brings life out of death, the God whose faithfulness and love are unwavering. The God who has called them, claimed them, redeemed them, and made them his own.

The full and decisive revelation of God's faithfulness and love is in Jesus Christ. God sends his own child, his Son, in order to make himself known to us. Again, "known" not just in the sense of offering us a collection of religious information that we should master, but "known" in the sense of giving himself to us, desiring that we'll receive him and the life he brings.

That's what Jesus himself is talking about in our Scripture reading from John. He's talking about how the Father draws people to himself, the Son, by teaching them. Jesus says, "Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me" (6:45b). So Jesus uses at least three phrases to describe how the Father draws people to Jesus. He calls it "being taught." He calls it "hearing from" God. He calls it "learning from God." That's how God enables us to know who he is, by enabling us to know who Jesus is. God speaks to you in Jesus. God's purpose is to draw you to Jesus. And by knowing Jesus you know the Lord. That's what it means to be a child "taught by God."

This weekend, there's a lot being done to celebrate life and learning. Mothers are being thanked, and tassels are being moved. And lo and behold, it all comes at the conclusion of Teacher Appreciation Week. All of us here today are the beneficiaries of those who have taught us, from the moment you were an infant in your parents' arms to whatever stage of life you're at right now. As the people of God, our primary educational obligation is to be taught by the Lord. That, more than any other reason, is why we're here in this place of worship today. May God give us hearts and minds that are receptive to his instruction and obedient to his will.

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Altala, San Diego, California. Christian Reader, "Kids of the Kingdom."