

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #13

Isaiah 6:8-13

Since this past week we inaugurated a new president, I heard the famous speech that was given years ago by John F. Kennedy when he had been elected president. Perhaps his most famous sentence from the speech was this: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

It would be wonderful if that principle were applied by everyone in the country and it sure would be a wonderful blessing if it were applied by everyone in the church. What a church you would have if all the people took the position that we are not going to ask what the church can do for us, but what we can do for the church.

Just imagine for a moment if people came to the leaders and said, do you need me to give more? Do you need me to come to more services? Do you need me to help call on the shut-ins? Do you need me to visit the sick or help shovel sidewalks? Do you need me to sing in the choir? Whatever you need, I want to do it for the Lord in this church. What a church you would have.

But unfortunately, rarely is this philosophy the one you see embraced by the majority. For the majority it is, what can the church do for me. This problem is not only a problem of the country or the church, but apparently when you come to this part of Isaiah it was a problem at the throne of God. Getting someone to actually do what God wanted him to do was rare.

I like positive ministry assignments. I love to preach about the Grace of God, the forgiveness of God and the mercy of God. I love it when people join the church and we get to meet with them and hear how they came to faith in Christ and we get to know them. What an upbeat moment that truly is. I love it when we can point out that our Building Fund has just hit a new level or that we have just seen an amazing answer to prayer. But I don't like negative ministry assignments. I don't necessarily enjoy preaching about God's pending wrath against sins that are an abomination to Him. I don't like to have to confront people or issues; I would rather just turn my head and hope they go away. I don't like to have to take a stand against someone because what they believe is Biblically wrong. But that too is a ministry assignment. The ministry of God is a ministry that requires both positive and negative things. One prophet in Israel who truly learned this was the prophet Isaiah.

We come now to the third and final part of Isaiah. What we see is this:

AFTER ISAIAH HAD BEEN CLEANSED, HE IS COMMISSIONED BY GOD TO GO AND TELL GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S MESSAGE.

Now as soon as Isaiah had been cleansed, there are certain events that immediately took place at the throne of God. Carefully notice the adverb that begins **verse 8**, “then.” That little word means all of the previous things that happened, Isaiah seeing God's throne and seeing how sinful he was and receiving cleansing, were all a prelude to this moment. You do not get the calling and commission of God until you have received the cleansing of God.

As we look down through these verses we may immediately observe the proper nouns Isaiah uses for God. “Lord,” which is Adonai (v. 8, 11), and “LORD” which is Jehovah (v. 12). This commission then is coming from the self-existing “I AM,” who is master and lord of the universe.

If we place this in its context, then what we see is that the type of person the Sovereign God of the universe actually uses is one who recognizes his own sinfulness and recognizes that his cleansing totally comes by God’s grace. Isaiah is not permitted to serve at this new level until he had completely acknowledged his sinful lack and had been completely cleansed.

EVENT #1 – Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord. **6:8a**

When we read “I heard the voice,” what we must understand is, other than God and the angels, Isaiah is the only person from earth there to hear this voice. No one else was even permitted by God to be in His presence to hear this voice. So Isaiah is not looking around at other people wondering if they heard it. I think this point is significant, because it shows that **God does not allow just anyone to hear from Him.** Isaiah was a very godly prophet who heralded the truth of God. He was a prophet who acknowledged the Sovereign holiness and majesty of God and the unworthiness of himself, and he is the only one God permits to actually see things and hear things that others don’t. In fact, John Calvin believed that this is a key observation to make. Even though there were many priests and prophets who thought they were qualified to teach, only Isaiah actually was (*Commentary On Isaiah*, Vol. 7, p. 212).

I have been intentionally watching a variety of so called ‘Christian ministers’ on television recently. What I have discovered is that the vast majority are given to “rah-rah religious hoopla” and not a careful exposition of God’s inspired Word. This world is filled with religious people who think they are qualified to teach, but when you actually look for those carefully unlocking God’s Word they are very far and few between.

Now the voice Isaiah hears is that of the “Lord” (Adonai) and we may notice that He asks two questions and uses two different pronouns.

Question #1 - “Whom shall I send?”

Question #2 - “Who will go for Us?”

By using the two different pronouns “I” and “Us” we know that there is plurality to the Godhead and also singularity. The doctrine of the Trinity, although not completely developed here, is fully supported here at God’s throne.

Now since God knows everything, the point of these two questions is not a fact-finding matter for God. God is not asking these questions not knowing what was going to happen or wondering whether or not Isaiah would respond. He is asking these questions to generate a response from Isaiah.

The truth is God has entrusted the communication of His truth to humans who have seen His glory and seen their own sinfulness. He has not entrusted this job to angels, but to humans. God is still in the business of using His men and women to communicate His Word to others. It is their job to warn of God’s pending judgment and present the grace salvation message to the lost.

Now **one of the reasons God permitted Isaiah to see His Holy throne and Isaiah's own sinfulness is because this is exactly what needed to be communicated to Israel** . Somebody needed to go to Israel and tell Israel you do not have the holiness necessary to be right with God and you need a cleansing from God, from all of your sin. Someone needed to see this and understand this and go tell Israel this and Isaiah was God's choice to do just that.

I can envision God sitting on His throne looking at hundreds of thousands of churches and saying who can I send who will teach every one of my books and not bits and pieces of them? Is there any one I can send who will declare the whole counsel of God? I'll tell you there aren't many. It is far and few between who will say, "I'll do it; I'll go get it done."

J. Vernon McGee made an interesting observation about many Christians. He said that he believed that many Christians have never felt like they were called to do anything for God because they have never really been cleansed of sin that is preventing them from being a clean vessel. Instead of them seeing the sin and confessing it to God so they can be used like Isaiah, they are content to just drift along in a life of total frustration (*Isaiah*, Vol. 3, p. 210).

You will be far more greatly used by God, if you begin your day before the Lord acknowledging the same thing Isaiah did rather than trying to impress God with how great you think you are.

EVENT #2 – Isaiah responds to the voice of the Lord. **6:8b**

When God asked the question, Isaiah immediately responded - "Here am I. Send me!" God knew that the entire nation Israel needed to have the same kind of awareness of their sinfulness and the same kind of awareness of God's holiness and need of His cleansing that he had. So he said to the Lord, I'll go and I'll be Your ambassador.

When Isaiah responded, "Here am I. Send me," he didn't even really know what the assignment would be. He was just willing to do whatever it was. Until we are willing to do what God wants us to do, we won't do much. God's assignment for you may be to be a good witness at your job. God's assignment for you may be to reach your family. God's assignment for you may be to encourage His people. The real question for you to answer is, 'Am I willing to really do what God wants me to do, or do I want to do what I want to do?'

Years ago I was talking with Mr. Miles about what he thought I should do to have some ministry. We were in a great church and under a fabulous Bible expositor but something was stirring me to do more. He said to start a Bible study in a home and invite people in and then invite them into the church. So I did. We met on Friday night and we met for five years and now, nearly 30 years later, some of those people are leaders in a church and some even in this church. It was a point in which I said, "Here am I, Lord, if you can use me, use me."

EVENT #3 – Isaiah is commissioned by the Lord. **6:9-10**

God agrees that Isaiah should go and He specifically tells Isaiah what He wants him to say and it was probably the last thing Isaiah thought he would be commissioned to say. Isaiah is given a very threatening and negative message to communicate.

God actually commissions Isaiah to go to Israel and do not tell her He intends to graciously save His people, rather go and tell them that He intends to ferociously judge His people. If you look carefully at **verse 9**, God uses a pronoun for Israel and calls them “this” people, not “My” people.

What Isaiah is actually commissioned to say to Israel is, because of your refusal to face your sin, God is not going to let you respond favorably to Him until He has completely humbled you and your cities and land to the point that you are nothing but a stump of what you should be.

In other words Isaiah is commissioned by God to tell Israel that even though there is amazing grace available to you, you refuse to respond to it so God is going to break you down to nothing. In fact, as Dr. Ryrie said, Isaiah’s message would result in an ‘increased hardening of the people’ (*Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1057).

(Warning Message #1) - Keep on listening, but do not perceive. 6:9a

(Warning Message #2) - Keep on looking, but do not understand. 6:9b

(Warning Message #3) - God will render their hearts to be insensitive. 6:10a

(Warning Message #4) - God will render their ears to be dull. 6:10b

(Warning Message #5) - God will render their eyes to be dim. 6:10c

Now at the end of **verse 10** God says I will affect your hearts, ears and eyes because I don’t want your eyes seeing, your ears hearing, or your hearts understanding. Because if you did see My holiness and your sinfulness, you would return to Me and be completely healed.

The potential is available for complete healing of all of your sin and that complete healing is found in Jesus Christ. In fact, when Jesus Christ was here on earth presenting Himself as King of the Jews to Israel, He used this very text from Isaiah and said that He was the ultimate fulfillment of this very prophecy (Matthew 13:14-15). If you understand that Jesus Christ is the King of Israel and the Savior of your soul, you are truly blessed because God has let your eyes see this, your ears hear this and your heart believe this.

Make no mistake about the teaching here - you can refuse to respond to God’s grace to the point God says - ‘I will not let you respond any more.’ There is an accepted time to respond to God’s grace and that time is “now.” You walk away from this message again today and it could be your last opportunity. God can and will punish your unrepentant wickedness by blinding your eyes, ears and mind to the ‘highest degree’ (Calvin, p. 216). If God would harden His own nation Israel for her refusal to respond to Him, He can and will do the same to any individual who refuses to respond to Him (Romans 11:21).

Every one of us wants a ministry that really bears fruit for God. But in Isaiah’s case, his ministry was to preach and bear no fruit. This was what God called Isaiah to do and this is exactly what he did do.

EVENT #4 – Isaiah responds to the commission of the Lord. **6:11a**

Isaiah responded by saying to God, “How long do I have to communicate this message to Israel?” **God’s answer is these things must be communicated until I have poured out My judgment.** Isaiah’s job would be to keep informing Israel of the pending Babylonian captivity and the church’s job is to keep informing Israel of the pending Antichrist captivity.

It is the job of God’s people to communicate God’s truth until God brings it to pass. It is our job to warn people of His pending judgment and His offer of salvation. It is our job to tell every believer, you are headed to a Bema Seat Judgment in which you will either earn or lose rewards that will stand for all eternity. It is our job to tell believers you will either face Jesus Christ with confidence or shame. Get on your knees and ask God to let you finish a winner for Him. You will not ever make this on your own.

EVENT #5 – Isaiah is informed of prophetic things by the Lord. **6:11b-13**

The negative things described here are horrific for Israel and Isaiah’s job was to communicate these things to Israel. Just as Noah kept building an ark, warning of the pending judgment of a flood, so Isaiah was to keep proclaiming truth, warning of the pending judgment of nations dominating Israel.

Now many of the things Isaiah sees were partially fulfilled in 586 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonians into Israel and did most of the things mentioned here. However, the ultimate fulfillment will come when the Antichrist is on center stage during the Tribulation.

Answer #1 - Until God has devastated the cities. **6:11b**

Answer #2 - Until God has removed all inhabitants from the cities. **6:11c**

Answer #3 - Until Israel’s houses are without people. **6:11d**

Answer #4 - Until the land is completely desolate. **6:11e**

Answer #5 - Until the LORD has removed Israel far away from her land. **6:12a**

Answer #6 - Until Israel’s land looks to be a totally forsaken land. **6:12b**

Answer #7 - Until there is only one tenth portion of Israel left in the land. **6:13a**

Over and over again Isaiah predicts only a very small portion of Israel will be left (Isaiah 1:9; 10:22).

Answer #8 - Until much of the land is burned . **6:13b**

The metaphor that the land will be burned “like a terebinth or an oak” seems to me to refer to a long, slow burning. Those who know anything about burning wood know that oak wood burns slow and long. This seems to me to be Isaiah’s point. Israel is going to receive these judgments over a long, slow process of time.

Answer #9 - Until Israel is nothing but a stump . **6:13c**

The stump that will be left will be the ‘holy seed.’

When Isaiah agreed to go for the Lord, he never dreamed this would be the message he needed to communicate to Israel, but this was it. It was his job to warn her of the pending judgment of God.

Who can God send, who will tell your neighbors about the pending judgment of God? Who can God send who will tell your relatives about the pending judgment of God? Who can God send who will tell your co-workers about the pending judgment of God?

Have you seen yourself as a filthy sinner and have you seen the grace of God touch your life? Will you go tell others? Can God send and depend on you?