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The Call to Kingdom Service

Isaiah 6:8-13 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." 9 And he said, "Go, and say to this people:

“ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

10 Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”

11 Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"
And he said:
"Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is a desolate waste,
12 and the LORD removes people far away,
and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
13 And though a tenth remain in it,
it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak,
whose stump remains
when it is felled."
The holy seed is its stump.

1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Romans 16:1, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea."

1 Timothy 4:6a, "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus..."

It should be obvious from these passages, that when a person is saved, they are made servants of Christ and His Kingdom! In fact, Paul exhorted all Christians:

Philippians 2:5-7a, "Have this [mind- which is more than an attitude; it is an outlook/a predisposition] in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant..." - that's "the mind" that ought to color how we view everything in life! Truly from this we conclude that an important part of ministry in the Kingdom of God is attaining the mind, heart, and focus of a servant!

Now in our culture "being a servant" no longer is attached to a trade or profession, it is easy to take these passages as if they were an ideal. Yet in Paul's day, the call to be a servant had concrete implications. A "servant" in Bible times referenced a profession, calling, or class. It was not simply a mindset, but something you actually became.

This ought to instruct us! Truly in Christ we are not simply to cultivate a servant's heart, but we are to view ourselves as nothing less than a bondservant of God! Isaiah understood this quite well. We have been examining that which went into the making of Isaiah into a servant of God (Isaiah 6:1-7). Isaiah 6 details Isaiah's formal commissioning as a servant of the Lord. And yet we've seen that this passage contains far more than Isaiah's commissioning. What is written here contains principles which can be said to be true of ALL servants of Christ... including you and me!

A Contradiction

Consider with me the elements of a call to kingdom service. Notice first it involves a contradiction.

Isaiah 6:8, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

Keep in mind the context; this is somewhat of a surprising verse. The last time Isaiah spoke, he sang an altogether different tune.

Isaiah 6:5, “Then I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...’”

Now the way Isaiah constructed this chapter, The contradiction is blaring and unmistakable. One moment the prophet is crushed, devastated, and ruined. The next he is boldly and somewhat rashly speaking out of turn, “Send me! Send me!” What’s to explain the extreme shift between Isaiah’s sense of unworthiness and yet his extreme zeal for being used by God? What occurred between the two extremes?

Isaiah 6:6-7, “Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs. And he touched my mouth *with it* and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.’”

When Isaiah went to the temple to grieve on account of the death of Uzziah, he went with a sense of unworthiness which was intensified when he beheld the vision of the Lord! Now we can’t be definitive here, but recall that on account of the reference to his “unclean lips” and those of his generation, it is very likely that Isaiah had gathered around himself a band of critics who took delight in slandering, complaining against, and so cursing the nation. Speaking of the tongue, James wrote this:

James 3:9, “With it we bless *our* Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.”

Again it is hard to be definitive, but could it be that this was Isaiah’s secret burden? On the outside he looked like a man of Christ. But on the inside, he was tormented by a secret sin such that he was hindered from “undistracted devotion to the Lord!” So what did God do? He took a stone from the Altar of Incense, touched it to Isaiah’s mouth, and thus claimed this part of Isaiah (recall that the Altar of Incense spoke of consecration and so the setting apart of God’s people to the Lord)! In essence, by this action the Lord said to Isaiah, “Your mouth is mine; see My forgiveness extends even to this sin!”

In response to this declaration of God’s grace, Isaiah wasn’t just relieved; he was overjoyed and so moved with a passion to serve the Lord! Yet I wonder: how long would it last? How long would Isaiah go on in his service of the Lord before he remembered a sinful proclivity? It is important to note that Isaiah 6 is not a record of the prophet’s conversion, but his commissioning unto the service of Christ. As such, the man, the Christian, who struggled with “unclean lips” no doubt would be one who would struggle again and again with his weaknesses and failings. How important it would be for this

prophet to remember this moment in his life- when God showed him that his “unclean lips” were not beyond the grace of God!

From this we see the contradiction that rages in the lives of God’s servant! He is ever and always drifting between a strong sense of unworthiness on account of his sin, and yet gratitude and zeal on account of God’s forgiveness! Who could forget the struggle of Paul?

1 Corinthians 15:9-10, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

Although John the Baptist was a lone voice crying out in the wilderness, nevertheless he considered himself “unworthy to untie Christ’s sandals” (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16)! And then the Apostles who in the face of Christ’s glory said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8), and yet from that moment forward lived the rest of their lives in the service of Christ.

We need to hear this. The false notion is held by many that to be a servant of the Lord is to be one who has arrived in their walk and therefore is not subject to the struggles faced by most ordinary Christians. *Look at that missionary, elder, preacher... they don’t struggle like me!* Read most biographies, and you will not read of ordinary men and women with ordinary failings. The way most are written we conclude that these people lived their lives on a higher plane!

If you subscribe to such thinking, you are holding a fiction. Ask any living hero of the faith and they will tell you that their greatest struggle is NOT difficult people, uncertain times, or even persecution BUT their own sin, sinful proclivities, sense of self-doubt, fear, worry, and many more such burdens!

This contradiction is seen in this passage concerning Isaiah is not the exception, but the rule. That which will characterize any and all who would seek to serve the Lord! With that, notice secondly that kingdom service involves a commissioning.

Commissioning

Isaiah 6:8-9, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ And He said, “Go, and tell this people...”

There are three truths we deduce from this passage about the commissioning which God places upon each and every servant of Christ. Notice it is august.

Isaiah 6:8, “then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?”

Much has been written in this context in explanation of the plural which God used in this passage, “...who will go for Us?” For example, some contend that the “Us” is employed because God AND the angels are being referenced. Yet nowhere do we read that God’s rule over creation is jointly shared by the Lord and the Angelic host! Others suggest that this is a “plural of consultation” as in 1 Kings

22:19-23 where God interacts with angels in His sending one out to do His will. The only problem is that 1 Kings doesn't utilize a "plural of consultation." Yes, there is a dialogue between God and the angels, but in the end the Lord is the one who did the commissioning!

What therefore is left is the classic explanation of this verse which contends that this is a plural of majesty employed to denote a sense of awe. See at profound moments in redemptive history, God utilizes the plural in expressing His will. For example at the creation of man we read this:

Genesis 1:26a, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."

We see it again at the fall of man.

Genesis 3:22a, "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil...'"

And again we see it at the Tower of Babel in God's response to the corporate sin of mankind:

Genesis 11:7, "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

At each of these moments, Redemptive History is at a crucial turning point. Accordingly the Lord God approached His creation with a formal majesty, "Let Us do such and such!" This is the language that is employed in the commissioning of Isaiah therefore it is quite significant! See, we might think that the sending of a man unto the ministry of God's Kingdom is no big deal. Yet that is not how God saw it! Truly, this was no casual moment. As the Sovereign Lord seated on His throne, God here is sending out a servant who would minister in His name! Accordingly, the Lord utilized the "Majesty of Plural" to convey to Isaiah (and all who read this) that this is a big deal! And so it is with you and me!

Most of us have heard of Billy Graham. For some reason during his ministry, he was courted for advice by every President of the United States: Nixon, Carter, Ford, Reagan, Bush, etc. One day after another visit to the White House, a friend of Graham asked him, "Wouldn't you like to be the President of the United States?" Graham's response was, "No! I have a higher call!" And this is the case when it comes to each and everyone of us!

And there is the term "saint." Some believe that this word only speaks of a holy man or woman who is higher than life. Yet the term is used in the Bible as a title for every Christian.

Ephesians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus..."

Jude 3, "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Acts 9:32, "Now it came about that as Peter was traveling through all *those parts*, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda."

The word "saint" comes from the Greek word used for something that has been claimed by God and

so set apart for His purpose. As such it can be translated as “uncommon,” “special,” “unique.” And that is what each of us has become in Christ. In eternity past, God claimed you as His own. In time, He issued forth the decree for the Spirit of God to regenerate you and so call you as a Servant in His Kingdom. As such your life no longer is lived in the mundane or the profane! The ground on which you stand is holy! You are not your own; you belong to Christ. You are His servant!

This was Isaiah. By virtue of the “Royal We”/“The Plural of Majesty” this man received an august commissioning to serve not merely as a President or King but an Ambassador of the most powerful nation the world has ever or will ever see, a nation which someday will vanquish the entire world! And that is what you and I have become in Christ. Speaking of himself, those who accompanied him, and so all who actively participate in Kingdom Work, Paul said this:

2 Corinthians 5:20, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ...”

This is the nature of the commissioning that rests on our lives. Truly, it is a high and holy calling! And this commissioning is something to be greatly desired.

Greatly to be Desired

Isaiah 6:8, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

I love this. At this point Isaiah doesn’t know a thing about that to which God is calling him. It could have involved:

- Cleaning out bed pans for the remainder of his life.
- Sitting at a desk in a dungeon doing paper work.
- A difficult job... a bad marriage... a feeble body.

Yet to Isaiah it obviously didn’t matter!¹ Before he knew any of the details, he was already on board! And what is to explain this zeal? Once again, Isaiah was a man who had come face to face with the glory of God, the unworthiness of himself as a sinner, and yet the forgiving grace of God! Christ himself said this:

Luke 7:47, “...he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

This implies he who is forgiven much, loves much! And so it is in the lives of all who serve the Lord with genuine zeal! Theirs is not the service of fear or obligation, but love! Truly what we are reading about here is the zealously of love! Geoffrey Grogan put it this way:

He is not coerced into service; rather, his will makes its ready response as a grateful reaction to God’s forgiving grace. (Gaebelien, Grogan, Feinberg, Ellison, & Alexander, 1986, pp. Vol 6, P 57)

With this grace in mind, Isaiah jumped at the opportunity to serve the Lord, even if that service wasn’t easy! From this we see a second mark of the commissioning of a servant; it is greatly to be desired!

Now my question to us all is, “What happened to this sense of privilege?”- I know I once had it. I remember early on in my Christian walk how much I loved Christ. I would have done anything the Lord asked! In fact, I remember one of my favorite songs at the time was by the Imperials called, “Only for the Love of the Lord.” The words are somewhat corny, but it didn’t matter. It reflected the passion of my heart and so I belted it out every time I heard it on the radio:

‘If I had the wealth of every nation and could afford to buy all of creation, I’d lose it, (only) for the Love of the Lord!’ And ‘If I had to swim across the ocean, with waves rolling and with fear and emotion, I’d do it, (only) for the love of the Lord!’

Can you remember when you held such a conviction? Then God blessed with degrees, jobs, houses, cars, spouses, children, ministry, professional honors, bank accounts, vacations, and the like- and we consider ourselves most blessed! Now in time the Lord requires of us one or more of these blessings, and what do we do? We respond with anger, resentment, and even bitterness. Somehow in blessing us with so much God has become an adversary; now we’re not sure we want to serve the Lord!

What happened? Somehow along the way we lost sight of the Giver and fell in love with the gift! Let me call you back to your First Love and to that time when service in the Kingdom of God was privilege! This is where ministry must be worked out! It is not obligation; it is greatly to be desired! Listen to the exhortation of Paul!

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

May God give us the grace to recapture that childlike faith and love that Isaiah had in our passage which said, “Send me! Use me!” way before he knew any of the details. This is where God would have us all live!

The commission of the Lord unto kingdom service is august and greatly to be desired. However it also places demands upon us.

Demands on Us

Isaiah 6:9, “and He said, “Go, and tell this people...”

This was the divine commissioning that Isaiah received, “Go and tell!” As it was a commissioning into the prophetic office, it was unique to Isaiah and a handful of other men in Redemptive History called as prophets. Accordingly, it is tempting to think that this command has no bearing upon us. Yet brothers and sisters, such is not the case. For Isaiah it was, “Go and tell!” Yet for us it is something else. For example:

- For the Gadarene Demoniac it was, “Stay and tell” (Luke 8:38-39)!
- or the Christians in Smyrna it was, “Don’t flee; suffer” (Revelation 2:10)!

- For the Hebrew Christians it was, “Don’t shrink back in your faith; minister” (Hebrews 10:39)!
- For the Christian married to a nonbeliever it is, “Stay and live” (1 Corinthians 7:12-13)!
- And for all in Christ it is manifold: “As you go, make disciples!” (Matthew 28:18-20); “...Suffer!” (Philippians 1:29-30); “Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice!” (Romans 12:2); etc...

From this I hope you see that there is nothing passive about the calling that has been placed on your life. God saved you with the full expectation that He would use you! Accordingly at times it may be inconvenient, trying, demanding, and possibly detrimental to your health. But nothing less ought to be expected by each of us! In 1724, Isaac Watts wrote thinking about the call that God had placed on his life:

Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas? (Watts, 1874)

There seems to be a lie which is readily believed by many Christians in the US. And that lie is that God saved you to make you comfortable and happy. God commissions each of His servants unto a specific calling/task and so a life which does not involve ease of days! So what is there to encourage us? The promise that ease of days and glory await us in the New Heavens and Earth! It was this perspective that moved Paul in ministry:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

And clearly it was that which moved Isaiah who is described in Hebrew 11 as one who suffered greatly for the Lord because “his eye was on the reward!” How is it that you and I will be able to submit to the demands that God places on our lives as servants of His Kingdom? We must set our minds on and so live for the Kingdom that awaits us at the end of our lives!

God did not intend for this age to be the Promised Land. Truly, today we live in the wilderness; but soon, we shall be at home with the Lord! With his passion and focus before us, let us diligently serve the Lord.

We have seen two characteristics about the ministry to which we’ve been called in Christ:

1. It is worked out in Contradiction on the part of the child of God. On the one hand he sees his failings and so is tempted to shrink back. But on the other he sees the Lord and so is impelled to give his life in service. This is where ministry takes place. The tension will never be resolved in this life!
2. It involves a Commissioning which is (1) August/High and Holy, (2) is Greatly to be Desired, and yet (3) will Demand much from us!

Let us embrace this calling and the life that comes as a result, in the words of Hebrews, let us:

Hebrews 3:13, "...encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

End Notes

¹ As it was, it did involve living as an alien and stranger in this world, being the continual object of the nation's ridicule and hatred, and eventually being martyred.

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About the Preacher

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