

THE PREPARATION OF A PROPHET  
Isaiah 6

Intro: This morning I considered with you the place that sufferings had in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, and how those sufferings were used to further his ministry.

Tonight I want to consider with you, from Isaiah 6, how the Lord called Isaiah, and how the very nature of that call indicated how God was preparing him for his ministry in a very difficult time in Judah's history.

Most of us know this chapter very well. I myself have taught it a number of times. But I want to point out some things in this great chapter which I have not pointed out in exactly the same way before.

The first thing that we have in the chapter is . . .

I. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE LORD (Isa. 6:1-4).

This is brought out, first of all,

A. By way of a comparison: with King Uzziah.

Several things can be said about Uzziah. See 2 Chron. 26 and 2 Kings 15.

1. He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord for most of his reign. See 2 Kings 26:4. He was a good king in days when it was not popular to be good.
2. He reigned a long time: 52 years. He started out when he was only 16 years old.
3. He did spend the last years of his life as a leper because sought to take over the work of the priests. This must have been a great heartache to Isaiah.
4. Finally, he died.

For Isaiah's call to be dated as "in the year that king Uzziah died" is to say a great deal.

Isaiah needed to learn that the work of the Lord is not dependent upon any man. All men have their faults. They will often fail you when you need them the most. And finally they die. But how different it is with the Lord. He will never disappoint you, nor fail you. And He will never die.

So any person who is going to serve the Lord with power

has to learn that the Lord is the only One Who is indispensable.

Think what it must have meant to the Church when Paul died, and when Peter died, and finally when John, the last of the Apostles, died. Think of the death of Luther and of Calvin, or of Jonathan Edwards, or of Whitefield, or of Spurgeon. And hundreds of others could be mentioned. Each one had his place in the history of the church, but their deaths did not put an end to the work of the Lord.

And let us remember that the same will be true of us. And it is only as we keep our eyes on the Lord that we will see the whole picture of the work of the Lord as we ought to see it.

But Isaiah also saw the Lord . . .

B. In His position and glory.

1. He was sitting upon a throne.

In verse 5 Isaiah called Him, "the King, the Lord of hosts."

But this was not an earthly throne; it was "high and lifted up" in the heavens. Isaiah could see, nevertheless, that the whole earth was "full of his glory."

Thus, Isaiah was learning something of the sovereignty of the Lord. Uzziah might have been a great King, but his rule was limited to Judah, and even there his power was limited. But not so with the Lord! His power is without limit. He is sovereign over the earth, and over all of His work with His people.

2. He was worshipped by angelic beings.

This was something that Uzziah never experienced. He may have been loved by his people, but angels did not feel unworthy to be in his presence. They did with the Lord.

A man will accomplish little as a servant of the Lord who is not overawed by the majesty and glory of the Lord.

3. The angels ministered to Him as the One Who is absolutely holy.

Uzziah may have been "holy" in many respects, but he showed himself to be unholy in others, and he died because he sinned against the Lord.

Holiness has sometimes been called the attribute of attributes. How we need to be impressed with this characteristic of the Lord which is so different from men. He is without sin, incapable of sin, perfect in all that He is and perfect in all that He does. And this is essentially the glory of the Lord--that He is perfect in holiness.

This is what made Moses say, "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, who is like unto Thee?"

What a difference it will make in our lives and in our service to know down in the depth of our hearts that the Lord is holy!

Thus, no one can be compared with the Lord. There is none among angels nor among men who can be compared with Him. He is unique in His Person, in His sovereignty, and in His position and glory.

Anyone who would serve the Lord must first of all see the Lord, see Him as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in the Scriptures. If you need help here, read over and pray over Isaiah 6 until you share in Isaiah's vision as much as you can from what he has written.

But there is a second point which we must notice.

## II. THE POLLUTION OF MAN.

This followed from the first. You and I never see ourselves as we need to see ourselves until we look at ourselves in the light of what the Lord is. The man who boasts about himself is a man who needs to get a fresh vision of the Lord, if he has ever seen the Lord at all!

What did Isaiah say when He saw the Lord?

His first thought was not of the sinful nation of Judah, but of himself. And he cried out, using that word which expresses the deepest agony of soul, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips."

"Undone" means that Isaiah thought that the Lord intended to kill him then and there. He felt that he was finished! The word means that he was being "cut off." He did not know that the Lord was about to call him to minister as a prophet.

And is it not interesting to see the part of his body which Isaiah was most concerned about. It was his lips, his mouth, his tongue--the very instrument that a prophet would be using all of the time.

Perhaps the words of James in Jas. 3:2 will help us to understand the problem:

For in many things we offend all (or we all offend, or stumble).  
If any man offend not in word,  
the same is a perfect man,  
and able also to bridle the whole body.

For Isaiah's tongue to be defiled meant that he saw himself as having been thoroughly polluted by sin.

And then he saw that this was the problem of the people of Judah. It was not basically their circumstances; it was a problem of the heart. And he knew that Judah also deserved to be cut off, destroyed, that they would never again be a nation. They were defiled through and through, as he said in chapter 1.

You can never again speak of the goodness of man once you have seen the holiness of God. And surely one reason we see so much humanism in the work of the Lord today is because we are looking at man apart from any real understanding of Who the Lord is!

But is God without mercy? Did he show Isaiah his sin, and the sin of his people, only to destroy them?

No, when people begin to understand the pollution of their hearts, it is a hopeful sign. God is preparing to work. And so "the King, the Lord of hosts," sent an angel to cleanse Isaiah of his sin, and to prepare him for service.

Will you note that we have here the two qualifications for serving the Lord?

1) He must be a man who knows the Lord, who by faith has seen the Lord as He is revealed in the Word.

2) He must be a holy man, a cleanse instrument.

We can have our degrees and our ordination at the hands of well-meaning men, but here we have the credentials that are important to the Lord.

But there is one other thing I want to point out from the chapter by way of what the Lord did to prepare Isaiah for the ministry. Let me call it . . .

### III. THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD.

Here again we see divine sovereignty. There were certain

things which Isaiah needed to understand about the ministry.

Let me mention four.

- A. No man should enter the ministry who is not called. We do not choose the ministry; the Lord chooses His own servants. And one cannot help but feel that a great problem in the ministry today is that there are many men in the pulpits of our land who have chosen the ministry as a profession instead of being chosen for the ministry.

When the Lord says, "Go," to any man, he will never be happy doing anything else.

Secondly,

- B. The man who enters the ministry must expect the Lord to use His Word as He sees fit. See vv. 9, 10.

The Lord uses His servants in different ways. The Word does not always produce the same results. Every servant preaches the same Word, but not all people are going to be saved. And this is not by accident, nor by any failure with the Lord. It is not because the Lord wants to save men, but they will not let Him. Remember it was Isaiah who wrote what we find in Isa. 55:10, 11.

The Lord's servants must preach the Word, but trust the Lord either to harden with it, or to save. He does both! The Lord Jesus referred to these very verses in connection with His own ministry. See Matt. 13:14, 15.

- C. The man who enters the ministry must be faithful in proclaiming the Word of the Lord even when there appear to be no results. See vv. 10, 11.

When the results do not come, then we begin to think of ways to produce results. And that is when we get away from the Word of God, and from the blessing of the Lord. We must be faithful in proclaiming the Word even though no one believes! FAITHFULNESS is the word that identifies a true servant of the Lord, not success! It is not statistics which proves your worth, but whether or not you continue to preach the Word even when the blessing is not evident.

But the fourth thing is this (and see it in v. 13):

- D. There will always be some fruit. With Isaiah it was only 10%. His was a ministry of watching the tree of Judah be cut down. But it would be revived. When we

are faithful, then we see how faithful God is. His Word does not go forth in vain. He does work through His Word. It may not come as soon as we would like, nor as plentiful, but it will come.

May the Lord enable us to persevere in preaching His Word. Some may feel that the kind of ministry that has seen the blessing of God in the past will not work in this TV, entertainment, pleasure-loving generation. But who are we going to believe: the religious entrepreneurs of our day, or the Word of God? If we never see any greater blessing than we have already seen here at Trinity, I intend to finish my days here on earth doing what I believe the Lord has called all of His servants to do, and only that: to preach the Word of God as faithfully as I understand it.

Concl: Are you with me in this? This may be a passage that has a special message for pastors and missionaries, but obviously all of the people of God need to understand this so they will know the difference between a true pastor and a false one. Let us not get our guidance from men, however well-meaning they might be. Let us stand by the Word of God even though nobody else believes that it applies even to the work of the Lord in our day.