

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
Fall & Winter Quarters 2015

INTRODUCTION:

What we know so far... Isaiah is preaching to God's people during a time when they have recently experienced material prosperity but now they are engaged in war or potential war - northern tribes of Israel have allied themselves with Syria (Damascus) against Assyria (Syro-Ephraimite War, 734-32 B. C.). Assyria is going to destroy Israel (Samaria) and come against Jerusalem. It's not going to be pretty.

The *reason* why is because of sin. Jerusalem has revolted against her Father, against her husband. She is sinful, weighed down with iniquity, evildoers, and corrupt (1:4). Forgiveness will be possible; it will be made available (1:18) but Judah was to "consent and obey" (1:19).

Idol worship is their fundamental problem. They do not know God (1:3; that is, they do not have a relationship with Him) because they are worshipping under the terebinth (oaks) false gods (1:28-31).

The new, spiritual temple is going to be established in Jerusalem to which Gentiles will join and from which the law of God will be proclaimed (2:1-3).

In this new, spiritual temple peace will abound (2:4).

Israel needs to repent of pride, abusing the poor, and trusting in man, in his gods, his business, or his military.

Israel's leaders were not guiding men back to God. Subsequently, God would provide His own leader (4:2). To *Him*, the "survivors" would listen!

Israel's problem is that they do not accept and follow the law of the Lord. They despise the word of the Holy One (5:24). That is why they are experiencing a lack of knowledge (5:13). They need a Teacher who will teach them but also give them the right *motivation* to learn and follow the Law of the Lord.

Man is not lost because God *cannot* save. Man is lost because his sin repels him from the holy nature of God just as darkness is repelled by light. God is holy. How is sinful man going to stand in the holy presence of God? What is the perpetual question asked throughout the Old Testament and only answered in Jesus Christ.

As we saw in 1:4, Judah was (and we should quickly add *we* are) sinful, weighed down with iniquity, evildoers, acting corruptly, abandoned the Lord, despised the "Holy One of Israel," and turned away from Him. "Holy" is found 60 times; "Holy One" is found 30 times. If you are going to *come* into the presence of God, you *must* listen to what He has to say. That is why it is so very important to "consent and obey" (1:19) and go to Jerusalem to learn the law of the Lord, so that we can walk in His ways (2:1-4)!

So, we come to chapter 6 and three things are made evident in chapter 6. First, and foremost, is the holiness of God. Yet, this holiness is pictured in contrast with the sinfulness of man, epitomized in God's own prophet, Isaiah. So we see here that the prophet of God is no more holy or righteous than the nation of Israel. He is a sinner preaching to sinners. He cannot be their savior because he, himself, needs to be saved. But, third, we see, in contrast with Israel at large, Isaiah has the humility to submit and obey the Lord's commands. Chapter 6 is God's call to Isaiah to be a prophet, to be a light to *his* nation, to be a witness of God's work in the

world and Isaiah says, "Here am I. Send me." This is the attitude that God wants and needs Israel itself to have. The question is: Who will echo Isaiah's submission?

This vision is dated in the year that King Uzziah died, which would put it in 740 B. C., eighteen years before northern Israel will finally fall to Assyria but they are dominating the region. When one leader passes away and another leader assumes the throne, it can be a time of anxiety - it would be a good time to be invaded. Not to mention the fact that Uzziah died as a leper because *he did not listen to the Lord* (2 Chronicles 26:16-21)! But despite what is happening in the physical world, God is still on His throne and God still reigns. What an important message for us today!

THE VISION - 6:1-8:

Observe that the Lord is on His throne - the place for royalty, kings, but His throne is in a temple. The secular and the religious are intertwined - the king and the priest. We saw back in chapter 4 that Isaiah identifies the coming Savior as the Branch and Zechariah, in particular, identifies the Branch as both a king and priest. Here, we have two images also melded into one.

The vision of the Lord is "lofty and exalted with His train filling the temple." It is interesting that when someone sees a vision of God, they do not see *God*. The same is true of John in Revelation 4. They only describe what they see *around* God. "It is as though words break down when one attempts to depict God Himself" (Oswalt, 178).

Seraphim stand above God, ready to do His will. "Seraph" is "fire." These are "firey creatures." They are not angels. We have no idea what they look like. This is the only passage where they are found in the Bible. The seraphim (we do not know how many) covered their faces with two wings and their feet with two wings - a portrayal of humility, covering the body, as it were, from top to bottom. But, with two they were able to fly, indicating their ability to serve the Lord of hosts.

One called out in praise to God: "Holy, holy, holy. The whole earth is full of His glory." All of creation glorifies God simply by its creation - even human kind. Yet, mankind more especially can and should glorify God when they obey His word and fulfill His expectations. But that was what was lacking in Judah and Jerusalem. 37 times the word "glory" is found in Isaiah. There are 135 Bible verses that describe the holiness of God (Dale, 64).

While the seraph was calling out "holy, holy, holy," the foundations of the temple were quaking and smoke was filling the temple. Sensory and visual and auditory signs of the glory of the Lord on His throne. This is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where a quality is raised to the third power, indicating that God's holiness is "so far beyond anything the human mind can grasp that a 'super-superlative' has to be invented to express it" (Motyer, 81).

Isaiah was overwhelmed just as any humble God-fearer would have been, in the presence of God. Peter fell down at the feet of Jesus and cried, "Depart from me, for I am an unclean man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). To be blunt, until a man sees the holiness of God, he is not ready to preach the Gospel. And I fear there are a lot of people claiming to be servants of the word who have not yet seen the holiness of the Lord.

"But more deeply, what causes sin and iniquity? It is that arrogant, self-sufficiency which refuses to bow the knee. This is the ultimate uncleanness of which Isaiah had been accusing his people and now finds resident in himself" (Oswalt, 185).

Isaiah's answer is very similar to Peter's: "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." *The King* is not Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, or Ahaz. *The King* is the Lord of hosts, sitting on His throne in His temple. He is in control of the whole universe and the whole land of Palestine - both Israel and Judah. "Kingship is a concept that synthesizes in human terms God's many functions. God's roles as creator, protector, savior, lawgiver, warrior in chief, and judge were perceived as comparable to the roles of earthly kings (Ps 24; 47; 95-99)" (Smith, 188).

We saw back in 4:4 that the Branch would bring a "spirit of burning" that would purify Israel and take away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purge the bloodshed from Jerusalem, making the survivors "holy." So it is here that the fiery creature comes to Isaiah with a burning coal from the altar and, it is in a vision so it is not literal, touches Isaiah's mouth with it. Through this symbolism, Isaiah's iniquity is taken away and his sin is forgiven. "Sinful Israel can become servant Israel when the experience of Isaiah becomes the experience of the nation" (Oswalt, 174-5). He adds: "In some way, sin and iniquity must be removed if Isaiah (and his people) are ever to serve God with clean lips" (183).

Standing pure and holy in the presence of God, Isaiah is now in a position to represent the holy God to an unholy people. "The Bible consistently puts confession and cleansing *before* worship and service" (Beyer, 65). So, the Lord calls out, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah, humbled and purified, responds, "Here am I. Send me." Please observe that Isaiah does not yet know *what* God wants done but for an humble servant of the word, it does not matter. He stands ready to serve His Lord. "And our mission is first and foremost 'submission'" (Horne, 135).

ISAIAH'S COMMISSION - 6:9-10:

With the submission evident in Isaiah, God tells him what to do:

Go and tell. Isaiah's commission was to be a preacher, an evangelist, a servant of the word. Go and tell. This people - God's people. What was Judah's sin? Most immediately, in 5:12, "they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, nor do they consider the work of His hands." And 5:24: "they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

Keep on listening - The imperative followed by the infinitive absolute - *Listen to listen*. Keep in mind this verb can also be translated "obey." This construction emphasizes the *continuing action*.

But do not understand.

Keep on seeing - Again, the imperative followed by the infinitive absolute - *Seeing to see*.

But do not perceive. "One will not repent of sin until he first sees that he is a sinner" (Young, 258).

In verse 10, God's command to Isaiah is: "Make their heart dull, their ears heavy, and blind their eyes." Why? Lest they see with their eyes, hear with their eyes, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

But, isn't that what God wanted? Didn't He want them to see, hear, and understand? Well, it is just as Exodus spoke of God hardening Pharaoh's heart. He did that through His

works and His miracles, making Pharaoh more and more stubborn. But that happened only because Pharaoh first hardened his own heart. In the same way, here the people of Judah's hearts were already hardened, their eyes were already closed, their ears were already stopped up. Why? Because they did not want to turn and be healed.

This is what Motyer calls the "preacher's dilemma: those who resist the truth can be changed only by telling them the truth, but to do this exposes them to the danger of rejecting the truth once again - and maybe this further rejection will push them beyond the point of no return and they will become irretrievably hardened in mind and heart (Heb. 6:4-8)" (84).

This passage is found several times in the Gospels (Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40) and in Acts (28:26-27). The Jews by the days of Jesus had no more interest in understanding the will of God, turning, and being healed than the Jews in the days of Isaiah. In fact, by Paul's day (Acts 28:26-27), the Jews were still the same. Even today, some 2,000 years and numerous punishments by the God of heaven later, the Jews are still closing their eyes, ears, and hearts to the message of the God of heaven.

John writes in John 12:36-41 clearly that Isaiah here sees the preincarnate Word - Jesus Christ. Now, it is more than just the *message* which is going to harden Israel's hearts - now it is God in the flesh who is going to harden Israel's hearts. This is not unlike what Isaiah will say in 8:14: "he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

HOW LONG? - 6:11-13:

So, Isaiah asks the Lord, "How long?" How long, what? How long will Judah and Jerusalem be stubborn to not respond to the message preached.

God answers - until God humbles the people through devastation. "So the prophecies of Deuteronomy would come to fulfillment (Deut. 28:21, 63; 29:28)" (Oswalt, 190).

Yet even in the midst of the devastation, God will protect and preserve a remnant, a remnant portrayed as a stump, "the holy seed is its stump." Here is a combination of the promise of the Messianic seed of King David's dynasty and the picture of the Messiah as a Branch from 4:2. Again, Isaiah will make this image more clear in chapter 11. This is the only time this expression "holy seed" is found either in Isaiah or the whole Bible.

In every heart, there is a throne and a cross. When someone is self-absorbed, he is on the throne and Christ is on the cross. When he chooses to follow Christ, he puts Christ on the throne of his heart and he sets himself on the cross. - George Bailey.

SUBMIT - Selfless, Useful, Busy, Mission-Oriented, Involved, and Trustworthy. "Genuine love to our people demands that we tell them the truth" (Young, 262).

KEY POINTS:

If/when Judah will be holy, it will take the God of heaven to make them holy. Their responsibility will be to open their eyes and ears and understand His expectations for them (6:9-10).