

ISAIAH - WHO SAW THE LORD

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In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. . . . And one cried unto another, and said, Holy holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory' (Isa. 6:1, 3).

Isaiah, the evangelical prophet of the Old Testament, was one of the most renowned citizens of Israel. He was honored by all the people and mightily blessed by the Almighty. Recognized as the mouthpiece of the Lord, very little was done without his guidance and approval. He lived in a very difficult age. The king who should have ruled the country had been very foolish and as a result had become a leper. A regent governed the nation, but it was hard to decide who was the most influential—the regent, the high priest, or the prophet Isaiah. The final tragedy came when the ailing monarch died.

And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land. Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write. So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead (2 Chron. 26:21-23).

The prophet said, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD." Some writers believe this should be the introduction to the entire book. Maybe his ministry began in the year of the king's death. Others believe his effective service only commenced then; that previously he had been a prophet, but not a great one. Which of the two is accurate is not of great importance, for whenever the anointing came, it revealed certain truths which apply to every servant of God. Six fundamental facts serve as rungs on a ladder that elevates preachers

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from the ordinary to become extraordinary people whom the Lord can use and trust. It might be helpful to see at a glance the six things that transformed the life of this man of God.

1. His Silent Contemplation... Discerning.. "I saw also the Lord"
2. His Serious Conviction... Disturbing.. . "Woe is me"
3. His Sincere Confession . . . Declaring . . "I am a man of unclean lips"
4. His Sufficient Cleansing . . . Delighting. . . "Thine iniquity is taken away"
5. His Splendid Consecration . . . Deciding . . "Here am I, send me"
6. His Sublime Commission. .. Dispatching .. "Go and tell this people"

His Silent Contemplation... Discerning

A personal confrontation with God leads to two revelations: the holiness of God, and the sinfulness of sin. It is impossible to realize the first without recognizing the second.

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People may die, but God remains; for when human resources diminish, the sufficiency of the Lord remains unchanged. Today governments are complaining about the crime wave that threatens everybody, but few recognize its cause. When men

lose their vision of the Lord, increasing evil is sure to follow. The cure for the world's ill is not increasing numbers of policemen patrolling the streets nor new legislation. Mankind needs to return to God and recapture the vision that inspired our forefathers.

When Isaiah saw the Lord, he became aware of his transgressions. It is not possible to boast in the presence of God. Abraham said, "I . . . am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). Job said, "Behold, I am vile" (Job 40:4). David said, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity" (Ps. 51:5). Ezra said, "I . . . blush to lift up my face" (Ezra 9:6). Simon Peter said, "I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). The nearer a man gets to God, the more aware he becomes of his shortcomings.

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His Serious Conviction... Disturbing

It is thought provoking that such conviction should overwhelm Isaiah; he was among the most godly people in Israel. Unlike the publican who cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," Isaiah was noble, sincere, and dedicated. He was a prince among men. Nevertheless, when he saw the majesty of God he trembled and even forgot to worship. He looked at a palace with an elevated throne and a king whose robes were elegant. When angels chanted the chorus, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts," the prophet felt uneasy. The glory of God was like vapor emanating from an eternal source. It spread until the entire world appeared to be filled with its wonder.

Isaiah became confused and uncomfortable. He felt destitute and unworthy. Self esteem ceased to exist. He was upon holy ground. He wanted to hide, but there was no hiding place. He desired to run, but his legs would not move. Perhaps the writer to the Hebrews had similar thoughts when he wrote: "Looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith" (see Heb. 12:2). Christians who seldom see the face of God become argumentative, irritable, and unhappy. They resemble oranges from which every drop of juice has been extracted. They are flashlights which produce no light; their batteries are dead!

His Sincere Confession... Declaring

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts (Isa. 6:5).

It is difficult to reconcile this statement with another recorded in Exodus 33:20: "And he [God] said: Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." Moses was permitted to see the back of the Lord as He passed through the holy mountain. Perhaps Isaiah saw Him only partially or as one looking from a distance. He was aware that God and His throne were the center of the panoramic view he was permitted to see, but they were not looking into each other's

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eyes. The vision was sufficient to fill the prophet with a deep sense of awe and unworthiness. The glory of God was indescribable. Isaiah believed he was unworthy to behold the King of heaven. This experience is most essential for all who would serve the Lord. The hymnwriter was truly inspired when he wrote:

Oh, to be nothing, nothing;
Simply to lie at His feet:
A broken and emptied vessel
For the Master's use made meet.
Emptied that He might fill me,
As forth to His service I go;
Broken that so unhindered,
His life through me might flow.

His Sufficient Cleansing... Delighting

The imagery used in this statement was understood by the prophet's contemporaries. The live coal placed upon the lips of Isaiah cannot be literal, for it would have burned the mouth of God's servant. Some writers suggest it was indicative of the Lord's love which removes sin and inspires the recipient to serve the Lord. The details of the vision are not of great importance. The chief lesson taught is that true cleansing can only be obtained from the Lord. Men who boast of their

achievements are seldom close to God. Others who believe themselves to be unworthy are always candidates for divine appointments. The Bible speaks of cleansing by water (John 13:14), by the Word of Christ (John 15:3), and by the precious blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). Even the weakest instrument may become mighty when held by the hand of God.

It is interesting to consider the parallel Scripture in the book of Zechariah. Joshua, the high priest of Israel, was destined for prominence, but unfortunately was unacceptable in his present condition. The account is self-explanatory.

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that

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stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothe him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by (Zech. 3:3-5).

The pathway to blessedness begins in humility. A man is never as tall as when he kneels before his Maker.

His Splendid Consecration... Deciding

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me (Isa. 6:8).

When the Lord asked, "Who will go for us?" He expressed one of the greatest themes in Scripture. Gen. 1:26 tells how God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The same truth is expressed in Isaiah 6:8: "Who will go for us?" Evangelical Christians believe in the Trinity, where each member of the divine family is involved in the redemption of

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mankind. The Father planned it, the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, made it possible, and the Holy Spirit superintended the entire operation. This has continued since the earliest ages and will continue until time will be replaced by eternity. The triune God was concerned with the need of humanity, but someone had to publish that fact. When Isaiah heard of this need, he volunteered to become God's messenger, and made it clear he was ready to do anything. There were no strings attached.

Isaiah was very different from another prophet who was given a similar assignment. Jonah was told to preach to the people of Nineveh, but he refused to obey and fled to Tarshish. There is significance in the injunction: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (see Eccl. 9:10). To reject advice or any commission given by the Lord is to exhibit folly. Blessed is the soul who never flinches from his duty. "Not I, but Christ" should be the confession of God's people.

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Paul set the pattern for his entire ministry when he asked the risen Christ, "What wilt thou have me to do?" (see Acts 9:6). He did what was required of him and never complained about circumstances. At the conclusion of his ministry the apostle was able to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only. but unto all them that love his appearing" (see 2 Tim. 4:7-8). Diplomas are for graduates-not dropouts!

His Sublime Commission... Dispatching

And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not . . . Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant (Isa. 6:9,11).

Isaiah's message was destined to be heard around the world. The people of his generation were blind and deaf to God's entreaties and ultimately became slaves of the Babylonians. They deserved their fate, for they disregarded the warnings of the Lord and listened to their own soothsayers. What the prophet was told concerning the future of his generation was literally fulfilled, but the world now knows that he spoke to people of all times and countries. He looked down the corridors of time

to see millions of people whose need was as great as his own. He described the Redeemer of the world when he wrote:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:3-6).

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At the beginning of his ministry Isaiah said, "Come now,

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and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Toward its end he tells everybody where to meet with God. As my friend John Moore says in his delightful hymn:

Calvary is the place where my burden was lifted,
Calvary is the place where I was set free;
Calvary is the place where my blind eyes were opened,
Jesus, my Saviour, became precious to me.
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