

WANTED -- VOLUNTEERS!

Isaiah 6:1-10

Ascending the throne of Judah at the age of sixteen, Uzziah began his reign as an ardent reformer. Concerning the early part of his reign, God's Word says, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (II Chronicles 26:4). Uzziah manifested an unusual interest in the welfare of his subjects and was greatly loved by them. He erected great towers, built strong defenses and made noteworthy achievements. He overthrew the Philistines, the Ammonites and the Arabians. He gathered a standing army of 307,500, and provided his men with such a large supply of weapons that those in other nations considered them formidable. His nation was blessed with every token of divine favor, and Uzziah was hailed as the human saviour of his people. He was so successful and so popular that multitudes looked more to him than they did to God.

Enervated by such unusual material prosperity and great influence, Uzziah allowed his success to go to his head. Under the spell of his pride, he yielded to that arrogance and presumption which so often accompany success, went into the temple and sought to be more than king by burning incense at God's altar. Since this was a task that God had assigned to priests only, the high priest and eighty others rebuked him for his presumption, which reprimand he resented very much, whereupon God smote him with leprosy. That terrible disease drove him from the palace to the pesthouse. Royal personage though he was, Uzziah was compelled by the stern requirements of Jewish law to live the rest of his days in isolation. While he was in seclusion all governmental affairs were administered in his name by a deputy. When Uzziah died the faith of many seemed to collapse.

Among his fondest admirers, upon whom the death of the King had such a depressing effect, was young Isaiah. Of Isaiah's personal life we know little. It is certain that he was a citizen, if not a native, of Jerusalem. Apparently he belonged to a good family and enjoyed the social and educational advantages of that city. He became a man of honor, insight, wisdom, literary genius, eloquence, versatility and devotion.

I. Isaiah's Circumstances.

The death of King Uzziah was a severe blow to Isaiah. He had been leaning too heavily upon the friendship and support of the earthly King, rather than upon the wisdom and power of the heavenly Sovereign. There is always the tendency to lean upon the arm of flesh, but no earthly friend should ever take the place of the Lord. In fact, He is not going to take second place in the lives of those who call themselves His followers. It is an indescribable tragedy when anybody thinks more of any human being than he does of God. Frequently God removes human props so that we will depend more upon Him. Through the centuries the Lord has removed many individuals from their respective places in order to prevent Christians from being hero worshippers.

Isaiah had leaned too heavily upon royalty, and now his hero was dead and buried in an outcast's tomb. Bewildered, and wondering what would befall the nation, Isaiah wended his way to the temple to meditate on God's ways and to find comfort. The Lord's house is always the best place for anyone to go in time of sorrow or need.

In the temple Isaiah received a vision which made an indelible impression upon him and completely transformed his life and work. He saw the Lord Jesus Christ in preincarnate form (John 12:37-41) "sitting upon a throne" reigning in majesty and glory. The Lord had not just recently taken that position, but He had been there all of the time, waiting to reveal Himself to Isaiah, who thus far had not looked His way. When Isaiah could no longer see Uzziah upon his earthly throne, he saw the King Eternal upon His eternal throne. For Isaiah it was a golden sunrise after a gloomy sunset. Nothing more wonderful could have happened to him.

Isaiah also observed some celestial beings, called seraphim, standing near the Lord's throne. These ministering servants were standing, which was an indication of their readiness to do the Lord's bidding. They were full of swift energy, blazing with enthusiasm and glowing with fervent love. In describing them the prophet said, "Each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." Why did each one cover his face with two wings? He was overwhelmed with a sense of awe and reverence and was not able to look into the face of the Lord. Why did he cover his feet? His keen sense of unworthiness caused him to do so in order that he might not be seen. Why did he stand with two wings outstretched? He wanted to be ready to go instantly and joyously wherever the Lord might command him to go. He was exceedingly anxious to render swift and unquestioning obedience. Each of them cried, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." This cry was accompanied by a remarkable demonstration of divine power which shook the house.

II. Isaiah's Conviction.

When Isaiah beheld the glory of God and heard the lofty ascription of holiness chanted to Him, he saw clearly the sinfulness of his own heart. He discovered his own impurity by gazing on purity. When anybody stands in the presence of the Lord a sense of sin always overwhelms him. When you hear a person boasting of his goodness you may know that he has not been in the presence of the Lord. When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, he observed that there was a gulf between the Lord and himself which no effort of his own could ever bridge.

III. Isaiah's Confession.

Engrossed with the thought of his wretchedness and helplessness, Isaiah said, "Woe isme! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." He was especially mindful of their sins of speech. The lips are an index to the life, the external manifestation of what one really is. The way for a Christian to get sin off his conscience and out of his life is to confess it. God's Word says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). God's work is hindered greatly by Christians carrying around with them unconfessed and unforsaken sins. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

IV. Isaiah's Cleansing.

When Isaiah sobbed out the confession of his spiritual bankruptcy and repented of his sins, he received the assurance of mercy, pardon and

cleansing. His cleansing took place when he made his full and frank confession. He described this wonderful experience in these words: "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Divine forgiveness and spiritual cleansing are the entrance to a life of usefulness, promotion and honor.

V. Isaiah's Call.

Following his vision of enlightenment and his experience of cleansing, Isaiah received a divine call to work. When he heard the Lord say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?", the prophet was convinced that the One Who had so graciously cleansed him was appealing to him for service. Cleansing always precedes God's call to service. Moreover, the Lord always prefers volunteers to conscripts.

VI. Isaiah's Committal.

Isaiah did not ask a single question about the task to which the Lord was calling him. Without hesitation he was ready to go forth in obedience to the will of God. Without consulting anyone, he committed himself unreservedly into the hands of the Lord saying, "Here am I." He offered himself to the Lord just as he was and with all that he had -- his personality, his possessions and his plans. Sincerely believing that he had been saved to serve, he gave himself wholeheartedly in service for the glory of God and the welfare of others. He considered it an honor to serve the Lord, and was ready for any sacrifice which the honor might entail.

VII. Isaiah's Commission.

When he committed himself unreservedly to the will of the Lord, Isaiah was endowed with the glorious privilege of service. Having received a new insight into the needs of his people, he was divinely appointed to minister unto them for the Lord. To him God said, "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." This commission sent him on a new pathway of duty. He was sent to preach to a people who would wilfully turn a deaf ear to his message, and their refusal to heed would result in their ruin. It is encouraging to know that fulness of blessing will come to you provided you do God's blessed will in the place of His choice.