

WHOM SHALL I SEND?....SEND ME

Isaiah 6:1-12

Isaiah, the greatest and the most famous of the Old Testament prophets, was born about 760 B.C. Apparently he came from noble stock, had tremendous intellectual capacity, first-class education, and won distinction at the court in Jerusalem. He became a man of honor, insight, wisdom, eloquence, versatility, devotion, and literary genius.

Isaiah lived in an age which was very similar to ours -- an age of crisis and apostasy, or one in which people turned away from God. Wealth had corrupted the upper classes, military glory had fostered haughty pride in the people as a whole, the growing germs of fatal degeneracy were visible in all classes, the tendency to idolatry was widespread, and the national life was fast sinking into decay. The nation was dying spiritually, and was fast approaching judgment, as is our nation in our generation. What a wonderful age this could be, and should be, with all of the material blessings that God has bestowed upon us through education and scientific discoveries; yet our age is characterized by dissatisfactions, unrest, suspicion, jealousy, fear, unhappiness, and misery. The very science that would bless with one hand, smites with the other, and has given us the atomic and hydrogen bombs. We find ourselves living in an age of cruelty, materialism, paganism, and debauchery.

I. A Consideration of the Sovereign. 6:1a

Ascending the throne of Judah at the age of sixteen, Uzziah began his fifty-two year reign as an ardent, ferocious 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.

Having earned an enviable reputation as both a civil and a military engineer, Uzziah erected great towers, built strong defenses, and made noteworthy achievements. He overthrew the Philistines, the Ammonites and the Arabians, and gathered a standing army of 307,500, and provided his men with such a supply of weapons that other nations considered Judah unconquerable. 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 became so popular, that multitudes looked to him more 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 dared to disobey the Lord's command by performing the function of a priest by burning incense at God's altar. Since this was a task that God had assigned to priests only, the high priest and eight 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.

Like all others, the mighty monarch had to bow before the sway of death. Everything earthly is sure to change. The time comes when the actor must leave the public stage; when the reins drop from the leader's grasp; when the orator's tongue falters; when the laborer's arm becomes feeble; when the fire of wit is quenched; when the man with genius passes into second childhood. But not so with the Lord. His grasp of government is always firm, His heart of love always beats true, His word of promise is always to be relied upon, His thought of care is always alert, His arm of power is always ready, His hand of help is always near, His promise of grace is always sure and His Word of truth is always the same.

Isaiah had leaned too heavily upon King Uzziah, and now his hero was dead and buried in an outcast's tomb. There is always the tendency to lean upon the arm of flesh, but no earthly friend should ever take the place of the Lord. It is tragic 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 God has removed many individuals from their respective places in order to prevent Christians from becoming hero worshipers.

Bewildered, and wondering what would befall the nation, Isaiah made his way to the temple to meditate on God's ways and to find comfort. The Lord's house is always the best place to go in time of sorrow and need.

II. A Contemplation of the Scene. 6:1-4

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 in His pre-incarnate glory "sitting upon a throne" reigning in majesty and glory. Of this event John 12:41 says, "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him". The Lord had not just recently taken that position, over but He had been there all of the time, waiting to reveal Himself to Isaiah, who had not been looking His way. When Isaiah could no longer see Uzziah upon his earthly throne, because he had died, he saw the living Lord upon His eternal throne, and His train, the skirts of His wondrous garment of light and love, filled the temple. Nothing more wonderful could have happened to Isaiah.

Isaiah also observed some celestial or angelic beings standing near the Lord's throne, full of swift energy, blazing with enthusiasm, and glowing with fervent love. Each of them had three pairs of wings. Why did each of these celestial beings cover his face with one pair of wings? He was overwhelmed with a sense of awe and reverence and was not able to look into the face of the Lord. In token of his humility he covered his face. Why did he cover his feet? His keen sense of unworthiness caused him to do so in order that he might not be seen. In token of his respect and reverence he covered his feet. Why did he stand with two wings outstretched? He was exceedingly anxious to render swift and unquestioning obedience to the Lord. In token of his readiness to do the Lord's will he stretched out one pair of wings.

The seraphim afford us a model for imitation because they burned with love for the Lord, bowed with reverence and humility before the Lord's throne, and flew with rapidity to execute His commands. Such awe-stricken reverence, humble hiding of self, alacrity for swift obedience, and flaming ardor of love and devotion that they had should be ours also. In fact, our obedience should be more bouyant, swift and joyful than theirs. The seraphims felt constrained to cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." The repetition of the word "holy" was for the sake of emphasizing the holiness of God and pointing out the Trinity of the Godhead. Their cry was accompanied by a remarkable demonstration of divine power. So powerful and glorious was it that the house shook, and it was filled with smoke; if the seraphim employed their time in praising the Lord in song, how much more should we do so.

III. A Consciousness of Sin. 6:5

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. By gazing on purity he discovered his own impurity. When anybody stands in the presence of the Lord a sense of sin always overwhelms him. If you hear a person boasting of his goodness, you may know that he has not been in the immediate presence of the Lord. The clearer the vision of the Lord the keener will be the consciousness of sin. 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.

IV. A Confession of Sin. 6:5

Engrossed with the thought of his wretchedness and helplessness, Isaiah said, "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." He was conscious that his lips were not clean. It is so easy to sin with our lips. Unclean thoughts, words, and actions spring from an unclean heart. 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 whoso 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).

V. A Cleansing From Sin. 6:6-7

As soon as Isaiah sobbed out the full and frank confession of his spiritual bankruptcy and repented of his sins, the Lord sent His messenger to accomplish the work of cleansing. The provision for Isaiah's need was already there, and waiting to be applied. It was surely significant that one of the very seraphim whose cry had awakened him to a consciousness of sin was now the agent or instrument in applying the cure.

Isaiah described his wonderful experience of receiving the assurance of mercy, pardon and cleansing in these words: "Then flew one of the seraphim 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." There are things which we can do to clean up our lives, and these we ought to do with all the vigor of our being, but there are other things which the Lord alone can do. Forgiving and cleansing us from our sins are His prerogatives. Divine forgiveness and spiritual cleansing constitute the entrance to a life of usefulness, honor, and promotion.

VI. A Challenge to Service. 6:8

Following his vision of enlightenment and experience of cleansing, Isaiah received a personal, persuasive and pressing challenge to service. He heard the Lord say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" He realized that there were some things which the Lord would do through the angels, but that there were many other tasks to be performed that required the agency of human beings. It dawned on him that the Lord was looking, waiting and calling for a human instrument through whom He might accomplish His purpose. Specifically He was looking for a messenger to His people. Until this good hour God is looking for volunteers from among those whom He has saved to carry the gospel of Christ to those who are unsaved. He certainly needs Christians to work for Him today. When Missionary Matthew T. Yates was on his deathbed in China, after giving forty years of his life in service for the Lord there, a fellow missionary, Bryan, was by his bedside. The latter saw tears well up in the eyes of the veteran missionary, and he said, "Yates, what's the matter?" He replied, "O, I was just thinking of China and China's need." Brother Bryan said, "It is God's work, and He will take care of it." "Yes," said the pioneer for the Lord, "but God needs men."

VII. A Committal To Serve. 6:8

Without consulting anyone, Isaiah unreservedly committed himself into the hands of the Lord saying, "Here am I; send me."

He did not ask a single question about the task to which the Lord was calling him. Without any hesitation he volunteered to go forth in the name of the Lord and do whatever work He might assign to him. It is noteworthy that Isaiah did not say, "Send somebody else," but he said, "Send me." Instead of trying to shirk his responsibility, as so many professing Christians do, Isaiah willingly and cheerfully accepted it. He offered himself to the Lord just as he was and with what he had -- his personality, his possessions, and his plans. He considered it an honor and a privilege to serve the Lord, and he was ready for any sacrifice which might become necessary in order to do so.

VIII. A Commission To Serve. 6:9-12

Having committed himself to do the will of God, and having received a new insight into the needs of his people, Isaiah was divinely appointed and commissioned to minister unto them. The choice of a field in which he was to serve, and the conditions and terms under which he was to work were left entirely with the One Who had commissioned him.

His commission sent him on a very difficult mission, namely, to deliver God's message to the people and to warn them of the approaching judgment. God informed Isaiah that He was sending him to preach to those who would willingly turn a deaf ear to his message, but their real refusal to heed would result in their destruction. Since God had told him that his ministry would not be successful, according to the accepted meaning of that word, Isaiah inquired as to how long the people would continue in their rebellion, and consequently how long he should continue to preach to them.

He was told that he must continue to preach God's message to the people until divine judgment was executed upon them. After all, the prophet's task was to do what God wanted and told him to do.

The same thing applies to us. God does not judge His children on the basis of results, but according to their faithfulness and obedience to Him. It is the duty of rightfully every Christian to yield himself to the Lord, to go wherever He leads, to be faithful in bearing His message to others, and to leave the results with Him. Fulness of blessing will come to you if you will do the Lord's will in the place where He has called and commissioned you to serve. In reply to His question, "Whom shall I send?" won't you say, "Lord, here am I; send me"!