

“Serving the God Who Sends”
Isaiah 6:1-13

Read Isaiah 6:1-7

Let’s take that in for a moment.

This is one of the most spectacular passages in all of Scripture.

The sights and sounds of the glory of God in his temple are breath taking. It is enough that we’ve read and heard it this morning.

The text is also one of the most powerful passages in Scripture.

Passage is used by God to call us into service. It is used by God to keep us in His service.

God has spoken through it to call thousands to serve Him. Maybe even some of us.

It is also a powerful passage because God has spoken through these words to help us keep serving Him. In the face of

challenging times, insurmountable obstacles, human frailties, these verses help us continue to say “yes” to God.

One writer put it this way: *But the preacher of the gospel, who faces the apparent failure of his ministry, and who is therefore tempted to despair, may recognize from the example of Isaiah that he is required to be wholly on the side of God in his heart, and to let himself be used by him as a tool in whatever way God pleases.* (Kaiser)

However, as I have mentioned in other messages, the leading character in this passage is not Isaiah. And it's not us. It is God.

The passage is used by God to remind us of his holiness, his otherness. He gives us a glimpse of his majesty and authority. He reveals just a portion of his power and his glory. And it's only a partial revelation because we can't handle seeing and hearing all of who He is. It would consume us in an instant.

One of the interesting things about the text is that God doesn't speak until after Isaiah is prepared to be in God's presence. He lets the angels do the talking. He lets the seraphim do the singing. He lets the heavenly host do the cleansing. And then finally, when everything is ready – and when He is ready – God speaks:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

(Isaiah 6:8)

Who is this God who sends a man to do his bidding? Who is this God that bothers with humanity?

Some thoughts:

First, this God is not a tyrant god, wielding an iron club over the heads and hearts of those who fear him. He is not a cruel dictator like Qaddafi and the others who are crushing the people who resist them.

Nor is God a taskmaster god whose expectations are high and whose grace is low. He does not delight in getting people to do just what he wants them to because he wants them to. It's common to think of God that way:

Lake Woebegon: Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility

Bumper sticker: "Jesus is coming – look busy"

Or maybe: "The more you complain, the longer God makes you live"

To view God as a tyrant or taskmaster is to put him in the same league with all the other gods humanity has ever created. It is to create Him in our image. The text tells us that He is more than that.

In his book *The Prophets*, Abraham Heschel reminds that:

Any thought [that God is] an objective, or a Platonic self-subsistence of ideas, be it the idea of beauty or justice is alien to the prophets. God is all-personal, all-subject. His ethos and pathos are one.

Heschel goes on to say:

It is a thought staggering and hardly compatible with any rational approach to the understanding of God, that the Creator of heaven and earth should care about how an obscure man behaves toward poor widows and orphans.

But he does care. The amazing, unexplainable, irrational truth is that the Creator of the universe cares about you and me and the rest of humanity, and has done so from the beginning.

One of my favorite bands these days is the David Crowder Band.

The words to one of their songs help me here:

*He is jealous for me
Loves like a hurricane, I am a tree
Bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy*

*When all of a sudden
I am unaware of these afflictions eclipsed by glory
And I realize just how beautiful You are
And how great Your affections are for me*

*O how He loves us, oh
Oh, how He loves us
How He loves us all*

*We are His portion and He is our prize
Drawn to redemption by the grace in His eyes
If grace is an ocean we're all sinking*

*So Heaven meets earth
Like a sloppy wet (unforeseen) kiss
And my heart turns violently inside of my chest
I don't have time to maintain these regrets
When I think about the way that*

*O how He loves us, oh
Oh, how He loves us
How He loves us all*

The Lord of this passage, the Lord of the vision, the Lord of the universe is not dispassionate. He loves us all.

Heschel one more time:

*What the prophets proclaim is God's intimate relatedness to man.
It is this fact that puts all of life in a divine perspective, in which
the rights of man become, as it were, divine prerogatives. Man
stands under God's concern.*

The passage also helps us understand that God does more than just dispatch messengers and prophets to do his bidding. God's actions here are evidence of the *mission Dei* - the "mission of God." But as a blogger by the name of Henk Medema points out:

. . . it should be read in a double way . . . God is the author of mission . . . but God is also the object of mission. God sends Himself. He is both the Sender and the Sent One. (Medema)

Jeremy Allen, one of my students, helped me see this through one of the sermons he preached in class last term. Jeremy said something like:

In John 3:17 we read that God 'sent' his Son. It's the kind of thing we would expect him to do. But in John 3:16 it says God 'gave' his one and only begotten son. "Out of love God 'gave' his Son to the world as a gift; not just 'sent' his son to complete a mission or a task."

Again, God is the author of mission, but God is also the object of mission. God sends Himself. He is both the Sender and the Sent One.

Medema goes on to say:

“Believers are part of this mission, bearing the same burden that God laid upon Himself . . . This is such an important notion, as it helps not to make ourselves the source, nor the target of mission.” It’s not about us. It’s about God.

The final portion of the passage is often overlooked or not read at all. But I want us to take in all that God says to Isaiah, and all that he is saying to us.

[Read Isaiah 6:9-13]

God knows what he’s doing when he calls us. God knows what he’s doing when he asks us to do what seems impossible. God knows what he’s doing when the mission he has given us seems futile.

God knows that if we stay faithful to his calling on our lives, the “holy seed will be the stump in the land” and He will accomplish all that he wants for His world. And waits to see if we will serve the God who sends.

Works Cited:

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