



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

The Glory of the LORD of Hosts Seeing That Keeps Us Serving

Isaiah 6:1-13

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Introduction

1. Do you ever look at our world and feel despair over where things are headed?
 - a. Think of some words that we read in the papers/hear on the news: evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossips, malicious, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
 - b. While this list could be compiled from news reports, it's actually from Romans 1:29-31.
 - c. Things haven't changed much, have they?
2. Paul could have said the same thing. Listen to a text he would have read (Isaiah 6:9-13).
 - a. Here is a fresh reading of verses 9-10, from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. "He said, 'Go and tell this people: "Listen hard, but you aren't going to get it; look hard, but you won't catch on." Make these people blockheads, with fingers in their ears and blindfolds on their eyes, So they won't see a thing, won't hear a word, So they won't have a clue about what's going on and, yes, so they won't turn around and be made whole.'""¹
3. That was said to one of God's great prophets when he was called to serve. My teachers generally took a different approach.² Isaiah's commission reminds us of two things.
 - a. The work of ministry is often hard, requiring diligent, often difficult, service.
 - b. We are neither the first nor only servants to face such a challenge.
4. Now, put the ideas together: a commission to serve a world that doesn't seem like it wants to listen. Or, at a personal level, a call to faithfully go against the grain of that world.
5. This sermon is about how to find sufficient motivation to keep serving when the world does its worst. You may need to hear it now; or you may need to store it for future bad days.

¹ *The Message* (MSG). Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. <http://www.biblegateway.com>. Accessed January 3, 2013.

² The closest any came to Isaiah's commission was the one who encouraged a group of us to always pursue and declare the truth, and then added, "Just remember, Jesus told the truth, and they killed him."

Body

I. Real Circumstances.

- A. Isaiah's call occurred "in the year that King Uzziah died" (ESV) (ca. 740-739 BC).
 - 1. Counting time as a co-regent, Uzziah reigned 52 years (2 Kings 15:1-2), bringing stability to Judah.³
 - 2. Assyria was the dominant empire of the time, but because they were focused on domestic concerns around Nineveh in the first half of the 8th century, they were not as attentive to the activities of their vassals, including Israel and Judah.
 - 3. Uzziah was therefore free to expand Judah's territory through successful military campaigns and lead a period of economic boom (2 Chron. 26:6-15).⁴
 - a) He carried out large-scale building programs.
 - b) He waged successful war against the Philistines, took control of Edomite lands, and consolidated the southern trade routes.
 - c) He rebuilt the port city of Ezion-Geber (Elath).
- B. Things were good and distractions plentiful, making it more challenging to keep a singular focus on the LORD. That probably accounts for what we see in texts like:
 - 1. 1:10-17, where God rejected the people's worship because they were not accompanied by social justice.
 - 2. 2:6-11 and 3:18-23, where he pronounced judgment on them for using their wealth to make idols and promised the loss of their finery.
 - 3. 5:8-10, where he pronounced woes on those who added to their land holdings, connecting their practice with the breakdown of decency (5:11-12), integrity (5:18-19), law and order (5:20-22) and justice (5:23-25).
- C. The glory days they had enjoyed were coming to an end.

II. Clear Focus (6:1-4).

- A. Isaiah was called to behold the Lord's *majesty* (v. 1).
 - 1. He sat "upon a throne, high and lifted up," i.e., "very high."⁵
 - 2. He was in "the temple," the focal point of his presence (cf. 1 Kings 8:30).
 - 3. "The train [hem] of his robe [suggesting royalty] filled the temple."
- B. Isaiah was called to be impressed with the *reverence* of the Lord's servants (v. 2).
 - 1. The "seraphim" (only here in the OT) are in positions of obvious deference and service to the Lord's majestic glory.
 - 2. Their "six wings" (three pairs) complete the picture of reverence.
 - a) Two were used to fly, literally hovering over the LORD's robes.
 - b) Two covered their faces, indicative of reverence and awe.
 - c) Two covered their feet, a Hebrew idiom used as a euphemism for more delicate body parts (perhaps a sexual reference, but not necessarily so)⁶ or perhaps a

³ Think about it like this: imagine we have the same President now as 52 years ago.

⁴ See Rick R. Marrs, "The World of the Eighth-Century Prophets," *Leaven* 11 (2003): 67.

⁵ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, reprint edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 1:238.

⁶ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 24: 74.

reference to the eastern custom that forbade showing the soles of the feet in polite company.

- C. Isaiah could reflect on the *praise* of the Lord 's servants (v. 3).
 - 1. Verse 3 is a parallelism to make one point: none is like the Lord (Young, 245).
 - 2. He is "holy, holy, holy," a repetition designed to emphasize the trait.⁷
 - a) Holiness is "the distinguishing characteristic of God" (Young, 243).
 - b) It refers to complete separateness, independence from anything else.
 - c) Isaiah was evidently impressed: "the Holy One of Israel" becomes his favorite designation of God (12 times in chaps. 1-39, 14 in 40-66).
 - 3. The Lord 's holiness fills the whole earth with his glory (cf. Psa. 19:1-6).
- D. Isaiah saw a memorable picture of the Lord 's *power* (v. 4); talk about special effects!
 - 1. "The foundations of the thresholds shook."
 - 2. "... the house was filled with smoke," a figure often used to refer to the LORD 's presence (cf. Isa. 4:5).

III. Motivation from Seeing the Bigness of God.

- A. He saw the LORD because the LORD revealed himself to him, not "because . . . he was more spiritually attuned than others" (Young, 237).
- B. Because he saw the LORD, Isaiah understood his place and his mission.
 - 1. He saw himself in contrast with God and confessed he was lost (v. 5).
 - 2. By grace, he was cleansed (vv. 6-7).
 - 3. The same vision of God told him that the LORD is bigger than any challenge and made Isaiah an eager volunteer (v. 8), despite the difficulties (vv. 9-13).

Conclusion

- 1. In one of his books, John Piper tells how he began a new year of preaching with a sermon on Isaiah 6:1-4, the first of several sermons designed to expose his hearers to God's glory without "one word of application to the lives of the people." His training and experience made him wary about his plan. Would people not want something more "practical" and therefore more valuable? Nevertheless, he stuck to the plan.
- 2. His persistence was validated by a conversation a few weeks later with a young father in a family who had discovered their child had been sexually abused by a close relative. The dad took Piper aside and said, "These have been the hardest months of our lives. Do you know what has gotten me through? The vision of the greatness of God's holiness that you gave me the first week of January. It has been the rock we could stand on."⁸
- 3. How we serve is important; we ought to seek out wise methods. But, our search for methods can obscure the fact that we are merely frail servants in God's fight. Like Isaiah, let us remember that the Lord is bigger than any challenge. Let us also remember that, frail as we are, he can cleanse and use us in his service. "Here am I! Send me" (Isa. 6:8).

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⁷ A common Hebrew method of emphasis was repetition. See John D. Willis, *Isaiah* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1980), 140

⁸ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 9-10.