

13. “Here am I; Send Me”: The Prophet Isaiah (3Q 2008—Agents of Hope)

Biblical material: Lev. 16:30, 17:11, Isa. 6:1–10, 49:6, Jer. 3:22, Matt. 28:18–20, Heb. 1:2.

Quotes

- God uses men who are weak and feeble enough to lean on him. *Hudson Taylor*
- Lost people matter to God, and so they must matter to us. *Keith Wright*
- You can give without loving. But you cannot love without giving. *Amy Carmichael*
- It is not in our choice to spread the gospel or not. It is our death if we do not. *Peter Taylor Forsyth*
- We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God. *John Stott*

Questions

Why is Isaiah often called the gospel prophet? How did God speak through Isaiah to plead with his people to think and find meaning in their relationship to God? What was the basis for Isaiah’s enthusiasm for God? What particular insights did he gain? How is Isaiah relevant to us and what we wish to say?

Discussion

In his vision he records (chapter 6), Isaiah receives a whole new insight into God. Though he is overwhelmed by the glory of God and his holiness in comparison to himself, Isaiah is told that he is “at-oned with God.” It is from this basis that Isaiah is then able to share this picture of God with his countrymen, and given the command to go and share God’s message.

The message is rather strange. It almost appears that God doesn’t want them to repent and understand—which would be in complete contradiction to the rest of scripture. So we must see this as a voice full of irony, using hyperbole to make his point. Of course God wants them to change their mind and come back to him! Most of all he wants understanding—understanding about himself and his methods. For this is at the heart of the great controversy: the charges of the Accuser against God that God misuses his position and power. God and his government is accused of tyranny and injustice, particularly the abuse of freedom and individuality of his created beings.

So Isaiah is commissioned to speak out for God, to demonstrate the truth about God. And it must have astounded his contemporaries. Most particularly the condemnation of meaningless sacrifices that is a frequent theme in Isaiah—pointing to the fact that God is not looking for some legal adjustment of our standing before him, but rather he wants thoughtful, considered worship as part of a relationship of understanding. Through Isaiah, even right back there in the Old Testament, God makes it clear that he is looking to save and heal the whole world, including the Gentiles: “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49: 6 NIV).

Once again we see God working to convince not only his chosen people, but everyone throughout the world and beyond, so that his use of power and his character

might be vindicated before all. Our mission is not just for this world alone, but for all the universe, and not just for now, but for all eternity!

Comment

So it's quite apparent, it seems to me, that Isaiah begins like so many of the others with an observation that Israel was indeed so religious. But having a false picture of God, their religious practices did not serve them well; even maybe doing more harm than good. Even their coming to worship. And Isaiah says, "Who requires you to come and trample My courts like this?" Isn't it significant that after emphasizing the fact that they didn't know God and would rather even worship idols, though they still mixed it with the worship of the true God, we have in chapter six his vision of God. Right away. Isn't that appropriate at the beginning? ...

Unthinking, mechanical worship is an utter insult to our intelligent, gracious God. And it doesn't do us any good; it destroys us, to simply do these things because we're supposed to. And if we Adventists, when we're asked why we do something or don't do it, and all we can say is, "Well, because God said so, and I believe it, and that's all there is to it," that's something learned by rote. Or worse, if "It's a requirement of the church, and if the church says so, I do it, and that's all there is to it." That doesn't do any good, and it's not much of a testimony, is it?

So this rote, mechanical, unthinking worship is what Isaiah points to as being the cause of Israel's trouble. Look at Matthew 15 where Jesus quotes this. Matthew 15:7-9. How often Jesus cites Isaiah or shows that He had studied his writings. So here in Matthew, He's just been talking about all their rules and regulations; special ways of washing dishes and so on. (Matthew 15:7-9 quoted). Just doing it because you're told to. I never even told you to do these things. Again, it's unthinking obedience to rules which is an insult to our gracious God. A. Graham Maxwell, *Picture of God in All 66, Isaiah tape*.

Ellen White Comments

In the vision that came to Isaiah in the temple court, he was given a clear view of the character of the God of Israel... In beholding his God, the prophet . . . had not only been given a view of his own unworthiness; there had come to his humbled heart the assurance of forgiveness, full and free; and he had arisen a changed man. He had seen his Lord. He had caught a glimpse of the loveliness of the divine character. He could testify of the transformation wrought through beholding Infinite Love... The God whom they had been claiming to serve, but whose character they had misunderstood, was set before them as the great Healer of spiritual disease. . . . {CC 235}

The Son of God stooped to uplift the fallen. For this He left the sinless worlds on high, the ninety and nine that loved Him, and came to this earth to be "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities." Isaiah 53:5. He was in all things made like unto His brethren. He became flesh, even as we are. He knew what it meant to be hungry and thirsty and weary. He was sustained by food and refreshed by sleep. He was a stranger and a sojourner on the earth—in the world, but not of the world; tempted and tried as men and women of today are tempted and tried, yet living a life free from sin. Tender, compassionate, sympathetic, ever considerate of others, He represented the character of God. {AA 472}