

WHOM SHALL I SEND?

Isaiah 6:1-13

Key Verse: 6:8

"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!'"

The Book of Isaiah is written to proclaim the hope of God. Isaiah chapter 6 is a story of God's calling and commissioning Isaiah as his servant. God calls Isaiah to proclaim his message to his people, as well as to many pagan peoples. May God call us as he called Isaiah.

First, in the year that King Uzziah died (1a).

Verse 1 starts with the words, "In the year that King Uzziah died." As soon as King Uzziah died, the grotesque bells began tolling his death. But they sounded as if they were tolling the death of Judah, God's chosen nation. King Uzziah had reigned in Judah for 52 long years (787-735 BC). At the beginning of his reign, he was humble in the sight of God. So God blessed him and his people. But when his power was firmly established, he became proud. He once insisted on burning incense in the temple, invading the authority of the high priestly office. Because of this event, he was struck with leprosy and remained leprous until his death (2Ch 26:16-21). However, as long as he was on the throne, he maintained the national economy and defense and international relations; it was a time of peace and prosperity for Judah. But King Uzziah's long period of dictatorship provided an environment of corruption among leading officials.

How was the internal condition of Judah? The rich ground the faces of the poor. Most men were irresponsible and selfish. Most women were very immoral (3:14-16). Young intellectuals only drank from early morning to forget about their despair (5:11,12). What's more, King Uzziah's successor, Ahaz, was a slave of fear because of his unbelief. At that time, the world power nations were watering their mouths to swallow Judah. The people in Judah were distressed. When Isaiah saw the present national and international situations, he despaired (5:30b). At that time Isaiah was worried most about his family. "I'm okay, but what will happen to my wife?" The sound of the tolling bell resounded, as if the next one to die would be Isaiah himself. Judah was full of despair.

Second, the Lord seated on the throne (1b-7).

The Lord seated on the throne is God. Isaiah had thought that the world was ruled by the world power nations, and that Judah was too weak to defend herself. At that time, the allied armies of Northern Israel and Aram were plotting to invade Judah at any moment. The Assyrian Empire also was ready to invade his nation. The people of Judah were afraid of invasion and destruction by other countries. One day, Isaiah wandered around here and there to forget about his despair. By chance he strolled into the temple. What a surprise! In the temple, he looked at Almighty God on the throne. Verse 1b says, "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple." By the vision, Isaiah realized that God was on his throne as the Almighty God and he rules the world.

When Isaiah saw the vision, he saw that the world history is in the hands of God. After realizing this, Isaiah could proclaim, "Your God reigns!" (52:7) We need this faith. Suppose Emperor Nero, the devil, rules the world permanently; then, we cannot but despair. Thank God that he rules the world seated on his throne.

The Lord seated on the throne is the Holy God. Look at verses 2,3. "Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'" Seraphs are angels. Even the angels could not reveal their faces and feet before the Holy God. So with four wings they covered their faces and feet, and with two wings only they were flying. The angels were singing a chorus, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty." Holiness is the most important attribute of God. It is an ineffable quality that originates in God himself. Holiness differentiates God from all his creation. From time to time, we wonder why we have to live differently from vulgar people. It is because we live before the Holy God. To be holy like

God is the utmost desire of human beings. When we meet the Holy God, as Isaiah did, we can be truly happy, otherwise we are sorrowful all the time.

The Lord seated on the throne is the God of glory. Verse 3b says, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Before seeing the vision, Isaiah thought that the whole earth was full of despair and immoral men and women. Like Isaiah, many modern people say, "The world is full of mad men." But this is not the case. The whole earth is full of God's glory. When we see the world from God's perspective, this is very true. When we fly over the clouds, everything on the earth looks very small. Likewise, when we see the world with God's eyes, the earth is full of God's glory, and there are many men and women of faith who are willing to participate in the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 4 says, "At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke." This symbolizes God's majesty, authority and power because he is holy.

The Lord seated on the throne forgives Isaiah's sin and guilt (5-7). Look at verse 5. "Woe to me!" I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'" According to traditional ideas, anyone who saw God personally would die immediately. In the past, Isaiah thought that he was a little better sinner than others. But when he saw the Holy God, he realized that he was a terrible sinner because of his unclean lips. In other words, he was a man of unclean heart. Whenever he opened his mouth, he expressed his despair and something ungodly from his heart. He complained about his people's pessimistic ideas. But when he met the Holy God personally, he came to realize that his root problem was his unclean lips. The same was true with his people. Whenever his people opened their mouths, they expressed their despair and complained about everything with their unclean lips.

What did God do for Isaiah at that time? Verses 6,7 say, "Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'" God first healed Isaiah's unclean lips and forgave all his sins. When Isaiah met the Holy God personally, God took away the sin and guilt from his mouth. The mouth is the door of the heart. At this moment, Isaiah realized that he despaired because of his unclean lips, not because of his national situation. When we come to the Holy God personally, he unburdens our burden of sin and forgives us and fills us with the love of God. Moreover, he gives us spiritual eyes to see the world from God's point of view.

Third, God commissions Isaiah (8-11a).

Until now, Isaiah cried out because of his unclean lips. Now it seems that God is crying out. Verse 8a says, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'" Even though his people had abandoned God and rebelled against him, God had great compassion on them and was ready to rescue them from the power of sin and death. For this, God was eager to send Isaiah who met the Holy God personally and experienced his grace. God sends Isaiah to proclaim the message of God to the lost people. The love of God is marvelous. His love is wider than the ocean. Out of his great compassion, God was willing to send Isaiah to them.

How did Isaiah respond when God said, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" Look at verse 8b. "And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" When Isaiah heard God's calling, he responded immediately, saying, "Here am I. Send me!" How could Isaiah respond to God's high calling immediately? It was because he saw the Holy God who rules the world. Since Isaiah saw the Holy God the love of God filled his heart and soul. The love of God compelled him to go out to proclaim God's message of salvation. There is a saying, "Physician, heal yourself!" Likewise, without being healed we cannot go out to heal the sick. Therefore, let's go to the Holy God and meet him personally so that we may be healed and sent out to heal the sick and preach the good news.

Now God sends Isaiah to rebellious people (9-11a). As soon as Isaiah responded to his calling, God said to him, "Go and tell this people...." To what kind of people was God sending Isaiah? Let's read verses 9,10. "He said, 'Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving." Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.'" In short, those who heard God's message from Isaiah would be very rebellious and sinsick. They are people who firmly decided not to hear or believe in God. They are indeed rebellious people. Sheep are most afraid of being changed. They think that they would die if they were changed (10b). They are spiritually blind people. They are indeed miserable people in the sight of God.

Fourth, God is the God of the holy seed (11b-13).

Isaiah was stunned that God was sending him to such people. So he asked, "For how long, O Lord?" (11a) Two weeks or one month? What was God's answer to him? God said to him, "Until the world changes many times and no one is left." What a surprise that he should

go to rebellious people all his lifetime. God knew that Isaiah was a very ordinary person. But God was sending him to very rebellious and sick people to save them from their sins and plant the hope of God in them.

Verses 11b-12 picture Isaiah's mission field. It says, "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken." These verses imply that because of their sins, the Holy City would be ruined and his chosen people killed until there would be no inhabitants in the city. In short, God is sending Isaiah to a sinful people. Because of their sins, disaster came upon them and they lost everything. What is worse, the survivors would be dragged into captivity because of their sins. The fact that God sends his people into captivity sounds that our God too severe. But that is not true. God loves his people so much that he sent his people into captivity, in order to discipline them and establish them again as a Bible teachers' nation, shepherd nation and a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Divine discipline is sometimes very painful. But after receiving divine discipline, God's people can bear the fruits of righteousness.

Look at verse 13. "And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land." God says that new sprouts come out from the stump. And the new sprouts from the stump are compared to the holy seeds or God's remnants. God's work is the ministry of the stump. God's work is the ministry of the holy seed. God's work is based on the promise of God. Our God is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God's work cannot be done in a short time. Our God is the God of the absolute minority. But we must realize that our God is the God of the holy seed. The number doesn't matter. But they are the holy seeds of God. Also, they are true rulers of God's world.

The work of God does not stop there. Even though there is an impression that there are not many people of God, that was not the case. There are innumerable holy seeds of God in the world, who love God more than themselves. God's work is the history of remnants (Ro 11:5). God finds hope in the stump. See! Trees are cut down and stumps are left. To human eyes, the stumps are useless. But God finds hope in the stumps which produce new sprouts. God calls them "the holy seed." Isaiah calls them "survivors" (37:32). God's history is never a history of the ignorant majority. When we study God's history, we learn that the life of church has been maintained by holy remnants, not by cultural Christians. We must have great pride in being his remnants and the holy seeds of God. May God help us meet the Holy God. May God help us respond to his calling, "Whom shall I send?" "Here am I. Send me!"

Study Questions

1. Read verse 1. Characterize the times of King Uzziah (see 2Ch 26 and Isa 2:6-8; 3:14-16; 5:11-12). What does the vision of God on the throne teach Isaiah? (See 52:7) What difference does it make to know that God rules the world?
2. Read verses 2-3. What do the seraphs' attitude and song teach about God? What does it mean that God is holy? Almighty? That the whole earth is full of his glory? (In a corrupt world, how could this be?)
3. What happened? (4) What was Isaiah's response? (Read verses 5-7.) What did he realize about God, about himself and about his society? What did God do to cleanse Isaiah from despair and unbelief? Why?
4. Read verse 8. How did Isaiah respond to God's calling? (9-10) What results could he expect? What was Isaiah's response? God's answer? (11-13a) Read verse 13b. What do the stump and the holy seed represent? What can we learn here about how God works in history?