

## What Do We Need If We Are to Be Used by God?

Isaiah 6:1-13

September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Big idea: God's holiness exposes us. God's grace cleans and sends us.

Intro

### *The Boys in the Boat*

In the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, 75,000 Germans came out to watch an event they assumed their nation would dominate. In the other 6 races in this discipline at different distances they had taken 5 golds and 1 silver. Now it was time for the final race and tens of thousands packed the course while for the first time thanks to advances in live radio broadcasts, hundreds of thousands more listened at home. But their sure victory was not to be. Instead, a group of 9 young American rowers from the state of Washington beat them by 1 second.

An American victory wasn't too surprising. They had won gold in 6 of the prior 8 Olympics in the event. What was surprising was *this group* of rowers. Rowing was typically for the elite schools. The 1924 American team that won gold was from Yale and featured a Rockefeller and Benjamin Spock, who went on to become probably the most influential pediatrician of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But these rowers were poor, working class, sons of loggers, who were trying to survive and make it through college at the University of Washington during the Great Depression.

The 2013 book, *The Boys in the Boat*, by Daniel James Brown, tells the story of this unlikely victory by tracing the preparation of the team.

Isaiah 6 is a chapter describing Isaiah's preparation for the work God had for him. Next to chapter 53, it is probably the best known and most beloved chapter in Isaiah. In it we see God's call of Isaiah but I think we also see a model for how the Lord is able to work in our lives today and what is necessary for us to be used by Him.

#### 1. A big view of **God**: "Holy, Holy, Holy" (6:1-4)

##### a. This took place in the year king Uzziah died.

- i. Uzziah became king at 16 and ruled for 52 years.
- ii. He ruled well for most of those years and it was a time of stability and prosperity.
- iii. **2 Chronicles 26:5** He continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God; and as long as he **sought the LORD, God prospered him.**
- iv. **2 Chronicles 26:15b** . . . Hence his fame spread afar, **for he was marvelously helped until he was strong.** <sup>16</sup> But when he became strong, his heart was so **proud** that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.
- v. vv. 17-21 – He attempted to usurp the role of a priest and burn incense on the altar, 80 priests confronted him along with the high priest (they are described as valiant men), he was enraged and leprosy broke out on his forehead, he was a leper to the day of his death and lived in a separate house
- vi. He ruled for 52 years – the entire lifetime for many, probably most of the people of Judah. In 52 years we have had presidents Trump, Obama, Bush, Clinton, Bush, Reagan, Carter, Ford, Nixon, and Johnson.
- vii. His death would have unleashed uncertainty and fear for the people, maybe even for Isaiah himself.

1. Oswalt – Judah had known no king like Uzziah since the time of Solomon. He had been an efficient administrator and an able military leader. Under his leadership Judah had

grown in every way. He had been a true king. How easy it must have been to focus one's hopes and trust upon a king like that. What will happen then when such a king dies, and coupled with that death there comes the recognition that a resurgent Assyria is pushing nearer and nearer?

2. The people may have felt the same way that British foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey felt as he looked out his window on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1914, the day before Great Britain entered WWI. He remarked to his friend, "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time." Counting WWI and its aftermath, the Great Depression, WWII, he was right. They entered 4 decades of darkness.
3. Alec Motyer described Isaiah as a true Old Testament historian for whom the events of history, accurately recorded, are a declaration from and about God.

b. Isaiah saw the Lord

- i. Notice the word in your English translation is with a capital "L" and then lowercase, as opposed to all caps. That's what we use to indicate it's the word "Adonai" not the word "YHWH."
  1. What's the difference?
    - a. YHWH is God's personal name, how He identified Himself to Moses, it refers to His self-existent nature – He just is who he is. We translate it LORD.
    - b. Adonai is the word for a Lord or a King. That's used here.
  2. So what?
    - a. The human king who ruled for 52 years is dying. The great, eternal King is on His throne.
- ii. The throne room is a busy place designed to show the awe appropriate to the Lord.
  1. His throne was lofty and exalted
  2. His robe filled the temple
  3. Special angels were there called Seraphim.
    - a. Isaiah doesn't say how many, although the word is plural.
    - b. **Revelation 5:11** Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,
    - c. They were unique beings, created with 6 wings to cover their faces and feet as they flew.
    - d. Their body language matched their message – God is holy.
- iii. Holy is repeated 3 times.
  1. When something is important in English we can highlight it in several ways in our writing. Underline, exclamation mark, italics, bold.
  2. Isaiah's main tool at his disposal was repetition. They repeated things of crucial importance. Think of Jesus emphasizing a point by saying "truly, truly, I say to you."
  3. God's holiness is His distinctness. He is completely different, set apart.
    - a. **Isaiah 40:25** "To whom then will you liken Me That I would be *his* equal?" says the Holy One.

- b. Holy comes from the word “to separate” – we use that in a sense when we say something is a “cut above” – meaning it is the best, superior.
- c. Other things are described as holy in the bible, but it’s because they are set apart for God.
  - i. Holy ground, holy place, holy bread, holy covenant, holy nation.
  - ii. Not a moral quality but that they are set apart for God. God is holy in Himself and things dedicated to Him are holy
  - iii. In Rudolph Otto's study of the human experience of the holy, he discovered that the clearest sensation that human beings have when they experience the holy is an overpowering and overwhelming sense of creatureliness. That is, when we are aware of the presence of God, we become most aware of ourselves as creatures. (RC Sproul)
- 4. The angels seeing His holiness aren’t religious functionaries carrying out their duties in monotone. They marvel and so respond, “Holy, holy, holy.”
- iv. The whole earth is full of His glory
  - 1. Ortlund – Created reality is a continuous explosion of the glory of God.
  - 2. You know this, you’ve experienced this. You watch the leaves around campus and up the canyons outside of town change orange and red. You see the milky way pop out on a crisp moonless night. You see your new baby learn to grasp with chubby fingers. You look through a microscope at miniature but complex cells and know that if you could zoom in more and more you continue to see layers of complexity.
- v. The temple shakes at this declaration.
  - 1. No tricked out honda civic with more speakers than horsepower can compare.
- c. How does Isaiah respond?
- 2. A real view of **ourselves**: “I am a man of unclean lips” (6:5)
  - a. Woe is me – not “woah this is awesome!” but woe.
    - i. He pronounced judgment on himself. The prophets usually proclaimed woe on disobedient people. Think of Jesus in Matthew 23 declared “woe to you, scribes and pharisees.” Isaiah says woe is me.
    - ii. We use this phrase, “woe is me” but we don’t use it flatteringly. We say to someone stuck in self-pity, “hey, stop with the ‘woe is me’” attitude!
    - iii. In that moment, usually we see a false self-assessment, a false humility, a preoccupation with self, or a desire to draw attention to themselves.
    - iv. That’s not what is happening with Isaiah.
  - b. Not just a recognition of his creatureliness that crushes him. He has a bigger problem. In that moment he has an accurate self-assessment. His lips are unclean.
    - i. **James 3:6-8** And the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is

tamed and has been tamed by the human race. <sup>8</sup> But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison.

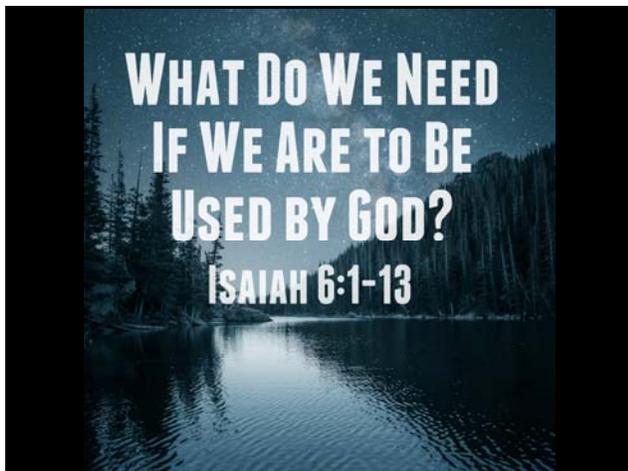
- ii. Isaiah is a prophet, but he isn't perfect. And it should not surprise us if as a flipside of his strength with words, his words cause him problems. His words recorded in scripture are inspired by God and flawless. But what were his words like outside of those recorded? Too quick to lash out? Harsh? We don't know. But he sees the uncleanness of his lips.
  - iii. Ortlund – the most telling indicator that God's grace is renewing us is not when we say all the right things about his grace but when we stop putting ourselves above others, and even above God: "I'm not that bad. In fact, I'm better than most. God's just lucky to have me for one whole hour every week."
  - iv. Isaiah recognized his moral failings and those of his society. Too often we just see the problems in society.
  - v. We need to say. . . the problem in this marriage is me. The problem in this church is me. The problem in my parental relationship with my kids is me.
    1. Of course there are other issues, but until we own our issues, we can't even see the others clearly. And we'll respond with condemnation, or too heavy of a club rather than with grace and wisdom.
3. A true experience of **grace**: "Your sin is forgiven" (6:6-7)
- a. But his experience doesn't end there, thankfully.
    - i. If all we feel is guilt and pointed conviction, we will despair and sink into sadness.
    - ii. Conviction should be a bridge not a cul-de-sac.
  - b. The angel came with a burning coal.
    - i. Fire can cleanse or destroy. Think of the heat in the sterilizing unit in an operating room purifying the instruments. Or the heat of a forest fire destroying 100 homes.
    - ii. This coal came from the fire that was kept constantly burning on the altar, the place of substitutionary sacrifice.
    - iii. Calvin – cannot separate the signs from the truth.
      1. In the same way bread and the cup do not take away sin. Or baptism doesn't wash away sin. Yet there is a link between the image and the reality that may not be broken without losing an essential value.
      2. A burning coal would char your lips in reality, but the symbol of it points to the reality of forgiveness from God.
    - iv. Oswalt – God does not reveal himself to destroy us but to redeem us
  - c. Isaiah doesn't ask for forgiveness but God initiates and forgives.
    - i. His iniquity is taken away, his sin is forgiven.
    - ii. It's grace.
4. A new willingness to **serve**: "Here am I. Send me!" (6:8-13)
- a. God asks who He should send?
    - i. He doesn't give the mission just the need for one to be sent.
  - b. Isaiah volunteers – Here am I. Send me!

- i. What a remarkable turn around! There isn't sulking but willingness to go, to be used, to serve.
  - ii. RC Sproul – He was not Humpty-Dumpty. In the nursery rhyme the fall of Mr. Dumpty is tragic because no one in the entire kingdom had the power to put him together again. Yet he was no more fragile than Isaiah. Isaiah was shattered into as many pieces as any fallen egg. But God put him together again. God was able to take a shattered man and send him into the ministry. He took a sinful man and made him a prophet. He took a man with a dirty mouth and made him God's spokesman.
    - 1. There is a pattern here, a pattern repeated in history. God appears, people quake in terror, God forgives and heals, God sends. From brokenness to mission is the human pattern.
  - iii. Moses, Peter, Paul
- c. His mission would not be easy.
- i. He will speak to them, urge people to respond, and most would not. Most would be hardened.
  - ii. We like to stop at verse 8. The NT authors quoted v 9-10 at least 5 times. Why? It explained what they saw around them as they shared the gospel of grace in Christ. Some responded, many refused. Same message, different responses.
  - iii. When you hear the Word of God preached you come away either closer to God or further, either more softened or more hardened.
  - iv. **2 Corinthians 2:15-16** For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; <sup>16</sup> to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?
  - v. **Matthew 13:12-15** "For whoever has, to him *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. <sup>13</sup> "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; <sup>15</sup> FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'
  - vi. If you find yourself hardening to God's message, ask Him for grace that softens your heart. The very fact that you notice it and it bothers you is an evidence of grace.
  - vii. Beware of mechanisms that you may use to deflect the message from your own heart, whether it is something I am saying here or your own time in the word or a Bible study you're in.
    - 1. Beware of being overly critical, never satisfied, always looking to apply the message to someone else, an impulse to delay responding.
    - 2. A growing believer is easily edified.
- d. How long should he keep speaking this message even though he doesn't see a response? (v. 11ff)
- i. Until eventually Judah collapses and is taken away until they are a like a forest with tree stumps sticking up and even those stumps are burned.
  - ii. But . . . from those stumps will spring forth life.

- iii. Illustration – cut down a cherry tree in our front yard that was diseased. Limb after limb was slowly dying. I cut it down to the stump with the intention of eventually taking out the stump. But, the stump has sprouted. There is life shooting out all over from it.
- iv. **Isaiah 10:33-11:1** Behold, the Lord, the GOD of hosts, will lop off the boughs with a terrible crash; Those also who are tall in stature will be cut down And those who are lofty will be abased.  
<sup>34</sup> He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an iron *axe*, And Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One. **Isaiah 11:1** Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

## 5. Conclusion

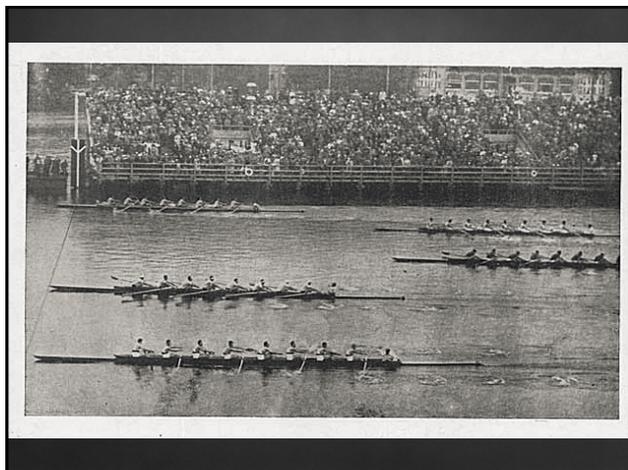
- a. God used Isaiah. Do you want to be used by God?
  - i. Within your family and the kids you love and care for and are hoping to make spiritual deposits
  - ii. In the study you teach or people you shepherd as a board member
  - iii. At school among classmates, at your job, on your street, in your apartment complex
- b. Start with a big view of God.
  - i. As you read through Isaiah in these months, look for what it teaches you about God.
  - ii. **Isaiah 40:11-12** Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry *them* in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing *ewes*. <sup>12</sup> Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, And marked off the heavens by the span, And calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, And weighed the mountains in a balance And the hills in a pair of scales?
  - iii. **Isaiah 40:14-15** With whom did He consult and *who* gave Him understanding? And *who* taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge And informed Him of the way of understanding? <sup>15</sup> Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust.
- c. Develop a realistic view of yourself
  - i. Our urgent need of self-awareness from last week
  - ii. A proud person, blind to their own faults will hurt others.
  - iii. The best counselor is first a good counselee.
- d. Be saved by grace through faith
- e. Be willing to do what is hard.
  - i. Teach a challenging group of kids, stand against the crowd on controversial issues



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