

A Pastor's Perspective: On Isaiah 6

“A Glorious Call to “Failure”

Isaiah 6 is one of the most magnetic passages in Scripture, drawing our wonder and interest with the story it tells. At the time, the prophet Isaiah is struggling with the loss of a morally decent king - a rare thing in Israel's history - when he is given a wondrous vision of God's presence (6:1-4). God's sovereignty, holiness, and glorious nature overwhelm the prophet. He quickly recognizes his own unworthiness. But God provides the means for Isaiah to receive the purification needed to remain in his holy presence: a burning piece of coal (6:6-7). It is in this historical context where our specific passage unfolds. Following the purification, the Lord calls out for a servant to represent him by carrying his message, and Isaiah enthusiastically volunteers (6:8).

Speakers at mission conferences all over the world find their fervent, emotional highpoint here, asking for Spirit-led men and women to commit their lives to cross-cultural ministry because God is looking to send them. Yet they too often neglect the larger picture of Isaiah 6. They ignore the actual mission God gives to Isaiah. His ministry is not to neighborhoods, cities, and nations for salvation. If you look more closely at Isaiah's ministry, you will see his ministry will have the opposite effect: he will be *rejected* and his message will *harden hearts* against the Lord. “Make the heart of this people dull. And their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed” (6:10, ESV).

Despite his future rejection, Isaiah enthusiastically signs up to be dismissed by his own people. He embraces a call to serve the Lord during a time of harsh judgement (6:11-12). There is hope of a remnant but it is faint, and the difficulty will resonate loudly (vs.13). So contrary to popular missiology sermons, Isaiah 6 is not about how an intimate encounter with God inspires us to *serve him successfully* wherever he sends us. Isaiah 6 shows how an intimate encounter with God may send us into service *guaranteed to fail* at sparking revival.

So much of the Christian world measures success by worldly, tangible standards of achievement. Yet in God's eyes, faithful obedience is more important than the spectacular success. Growth, financial prosperity, and transformed lives are all good things. But they are blessings from God not the earned outcome of our service. Paul recognized this in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

God still calls people like you and me to service. He continues to empower us with his Spirit. But he has not guaranteed us quantifiable success. He may call us to a doomed mission filled with hardship and difficulty, just like Isaiah. Will we be faithful? Will our vision of God supersede our desire for “success”? “Faithfully obeying God is infinitely more important achieving spectacular success for God.”

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