

ISA 6:8-13—ISAIAH’S COMMISSION AND OURS

INTRO: Many of us, when we think of the prophets—Isaiah, Elijah, Moses, Jeremiah, and the others—think of them as somehow “special.” Not like us. We tend to think of them as great men of God, but we think of ourselves as just common, ordinary, regular people.

That is a mistake. In **Jas 5:17** James says that the prophet Elijah was a man with a nature “just like ours.” The Bible tells us that Isaiah was married and had two sons. All the prophets were born like us; they grew up like us; they got hungry and ate; they got tired and slept; they faced problems and difficulties just like us. They were not superhumans. They were regular people just like us.

Common, ordinary, regular people are the only kind of people God can use. Why? Because that’s the only kind of people there are! More than that. We know that God is sovereign over everything. God has a plan for the entire world. He knows the end from the beginning. But God does something very interesting: He does not just say a magic word and his plan comes into existence. Not at all. Instead, God brings his plan for the world into existence *through people*—through common, ordinary, regular people like us.

What I want to do is talk with you about Isa 6:8-13. This passage is God’s commission to the prophet Isaiah. As we look at it I think we will see that there is very much we have in common with Isaiah, and what God said to Isaiah also applies to us here today. [**READ Isa 6:8-13**]

O/S: We are going to look at this passage in three ways: (1) We will consider the *context* of the passage; (2) We will consider the *meaning* of the passage; (3) We will consider the *principles* of the passage.

CONTEXT: The entire background of this passage is the sin of Israel and God’s threatened judgment. **Isa 1:2 [READ]**. God said, “I have had enough!” **Isa 1:11, 15 [READ]**. So he said, “There will be a day of reckoning.” **Isa 2:12 [READ]**. These same themes of the nation’s sin and rebellion against God and the coming judgment continue through the first five chapters of Isaiah. Yet even though God has repeatedly described Israel’s sins and has told them that judgment is coming, he still calls out to them to change their ways. If they do, he will forgive them. **Isa 1:16-20 [READ]** That is the general background and context of our passage.

The immediate context is 6:1-7. In **Isa 6:1-4** Isaiah saw the Lord and heard the seraphim. He knew that God was absolutely holy; he is sovereign over the entire world. Therefore, Isaiah knew that God cannot abide in the presence of sin and, as a result, Isaiah knew that he was ruined because as he said in **6:5**, “**I am a man of unclean lips.**” But he also knew that God had taken away his sin, because in **vv.6-7** the angel symbolically touched his mouth and told him “**your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.**”

All of that is important. Why? Because Isaiah knew that his life had been given back to him—he was only alive because of God’s grace. And therefore he knew, “**I am not my own anymore. Everything I have, everything I am, my very life I owe to God.**” Because Isaiah knew that, he had no problem in **v.8** volunteering to go to Israel as God’s representative and spokesman. So he said, “**Here I am. Send me!**”

What about us? Like Isaiah, if God does not remove our sin, then we are doomed, because we also are men and women of “unclean lips.” But God *has* removed the sin of all those who are in Christ Jesus. **1 Cor 7:23** says, “**You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.**” Christ bought us. He paid for us. That means we don’t own ourselves.

So why are we Christians living our lives as if it is all about me: my happiness, my fulfillment, my material wellbeing, me, me, me? To a very large degree, there is no visible difference between Christians and non-Christians in the world. This is an important spiritual issue. We must think about it in our own lives—especially because, at least compared to most people around the world, we have been so blessed. One thing we need to think about, when we think about God’s blessings on our lives, is: Why? Why me? Why am I an American and live in the Valley and not a person living in a remote village in Burundi or Tanzania? Is it just to enjoy TV and iPhones and all the rest that modern Western civilization has to offer, or does God have a deeper purpose of enabling us to do what the vast majority of people in the world never can?

MEANING: In **vv.9-13** God gives Isaiah his commission to be his witness to the nation. It is not an easy commission. Many Christians think that “**if I have Jesus as my Lord and Savior, then things should be easier for me; I will have less problems; I will get more money if I have enough faith; and I will have a good, positive life.**” If you are a Christian, you *will* have a good life—but that does *not* mean an easy life.

Look at Jesus. Did Jesus live a good life? [Yes, he lived a PERFECT life.] But he was a poor man. He never owned his own home. He had to borrow someone else’s donkey to ride into Jerusalem the last time. Jesus owned only one thing in the world—the clothes he wore—and they took those away from him before they killed him. Jesus wandered from place to place—on foot. And the rich people and the powerful people opposed him and attacked him. Then he was unjustly accused, wrongfully convicted, and put to death in a painful and cruel way.

Jesus said, “**A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.**” So don’t think that God has called us to an easy life. If we have health and money and a relatively

easy life, that's good. But that is not why we are here. That is not why Jesus was here, and that is not why God commissioned Isaiah.

So let's go back to Isaiah. Look what God tells him in vv. 9-12. God basically says, **"You will witness for me your whole life. But you are never going to see any fruit. People will reject your message and go their own way. And in the end, the nation will be destroyed."** But in v.13 God also tells Isaiah, **"I have a small remnant of my people, and you may bring some of them to salvation. You may see it or you may not. But you stay faithful. You are a part of my plan. So do not look with your physical eyes. Do what I have commissioned you to do regardless of the results you see, because I am ultimately in charge."**

We need to understand that because God is eternal—his character is the same now as it was in Isaiah's time and his plan for the world is the same now as it was in Isaiah's time—that means that God still acts now as he did in Isaiah's time. We know that because the NT quotes this passage of Scripture at least 5X. Jesus quotes this passage in connection with the parable of the sower. Jesus, John, and Paul all indicate that this passage relates to us. As in the parable of the sower, and as with Isaiah, we are called to be God's representatives—his witnesses—on the earth.

In fact, if we think about it, today's passage along with the parable of the sower is saying more than just that we are God's witnesses on earth. What do I mean? God is invisible; we are not. When Jesus was on the earth, he was the visible and audible presence of God in the world. After his resurrection, Jesus ascended back to his Father. However, he said that he would never leave us or forsake us. He promised that he would actually live inside of us in the person of the Holy Spirit—the same Holy Spirit who indwelt and led Jesus. Christ is in us, and the Bible says we are in him. We are called his body. Therefore, more than just being God's witnesses, in a real sense:

PROP: God's people are the visible and audible presence of God himself in the world.

That is an amazing and incredible calling. How does this calling play out in our lives?

PRINCIPLES: I see three principles for us in today's passage:

(1) God sends all of us as his witnesses to others, just as he sent Isaiah. Jesus made that clear in **Matt 28:18-20 [READ]**. He said the same thing to the disciples in **Acts 1:8**—**"You shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and even to the uttermost part of the earth."** Christ did not give this commission only to his first 12 disciples. He did not give this commission only to ordained pastors. He gave this commission to all of his disciples—that means us.

This commission applies in all places. I have the opportunity to go to East Africa several times each year to teach pastors and church leaders. You may not have the opportunity to go to other countries like that. It doesn't matter. You go places I will never go and you interact with people I will never meet. In fact, you go places our *pastor* will never go and interact with people our *pastor* will never meet.

That is why Jesus gave his commission to everyone who is a Christian. Our homes are a mission field: If we don't train up your children in the ways of the Lord, what will happen to them? Our offices or places of work are mission fields. Our neighbors and friends are mission fields. Jesus said, **"The fields are white to harvest."** So let's look around us. God has called us to go to those people because we know them, just as he called Isaiah to go to the people of Israel because he knew them.

(2) Our witness on behalf of God is through deeds as well as words. Being God's witness does involve what we say. God told Isaiah in v.9, **"Go and TELL this people."** Paul says in **Romans 10**, **"How will they believe in [Jesus] if they have not HEARD?"** Peter says in **1 Pet 3:15**: **"Always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you."**

That is why we need to know the basics of our faith: Who Jesus is; what he has done; why he is unique; why Jesus, not Muhammad; how does one become a Christian; and what does living the Christian life involve. That is why we at Community Church are developing a more formal discipleship program. Remember: Jesus said, **"Go and make DISCIPLES of all the nations."** He did NOT say, "Go and get everyone to say the so-called 'sinners prayer'."

What is a disciple? A disciple is a learner, a student: someone who comes alongside a master and becomes just like him. [EXAMPLE OF SOMEONE WANTING TO BE A CARPENTER] That's what Jesus and his disciples did. Jesus' disciples spent 3 years with him. They followed him around. He taught them; he answered their questions; he modeled for them how they should live; slowly by slowly they became like him. And in the end, they turned the world upside down.

That is why how we live is as important as what we say. In **Isa 6: 9-10** God talked about what people see in Isaiah as well as what they hear him saying. In **James 2** James says that if we don't help people in need then our faith is dead. We teach—we witness—in two ways: what we say and how we live. Both are necessary. But which do you think is more important: What we say or how we live? [HOW WE

LIVE] If you tell someone to do something but you don't do it yourself, they won't do it either. If we tell people to do something but we don't do it ourselves, what does that make us? [HYPOCRITES] Jesus attacked hypocrites all the time.

As God's witnesses, we are modeling Jesus for people. The Bible says that Jesus is the perfect representation of God. IOW, if you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. The Bible also says that the whole purpose of our lives is to be **“conformed into the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ.”** Just as Jesus is the perfect representation of God, so we are to be just like Jesus.

That means we should act like he acted, think like he thought, feel like he felt. His entire life was a witness of the Father. Jesus said that he never did anything except what the Father had him do. The same is true of us. Our entire lives are witnesses of Jesus. So we need to ask ourselves: **“When people see me, do they see Jesus? When people hear me, do they hear Jesus? And what kind of Jesus to people hear and see in me?”**

None of us is perfect. I'm certainly not. Because we are not yet like Jesus, that means that each one of us has certain changes we need to make in our lives to become more like him. Each one of us is different—and what you need to change may be different from what I need to change. But whatever God is telling you now—and you know what it is in your own life—*make that change*. It may be forgiving someone; it may be apologizing to someone and asking for forgiveness; it may be helping someone with a need you are able to help them with. Whatever it is: *make that change*. Begin a new life of being more and more conformed into the image of Jesus. God has called us as his witness just as he called Isaiah as his witness. Let's be faithful witnesses like Isaiah was, like Jesus was.

(3) Our success as God's witnesses does not depend upon our getting a positive response from others but upon our being faithful to God's call. Remember Isaiah. God told him that most people would not understand him. They had eyes but would not see; they had ears but would not hear; they had minds but would not understand. The same was true in Jesus' day. Jesus was sent to the house of Israel, but most Jews rejected him.

So we should not be surprised if the same thing happens to us. That is why we must not judge our success by what we see with our physical eyes. God judges success by whether or not we are faithful. In the Bible it says that one person planted, another watered, but *God* gives the increase. The person who planted did not see the harvest—that came later. The person who watered did not see the harvest—that came later. But planting and watering are both necessary for there even to be a harvest.

Suppose people do not turn to Christ as a result of your life and your words. Does that mean you have failed? No, it does not mean you have failed. If your life reflects the character of Christ and if your words reflect the truth and love of God, then you are successful in fulfilling God's commission—just like Isaiah was successful in fulfilling his commission and just like Jesus was successful in fulfilling his commission—even though most people refused to believe and change their ways.

You might say that God has sort of a strange system to commission us and give us his Word, give us the Holy Spirit, and give us fellow believers, all to enable us to fulfill his commission—and yet, even though he is sovereign and all-powerful, God does not guarantee the result. Yet, as I think about it, if we get Christ truly first in our lives, he does guarantee that he will change *us*. IOW, as we start seeing our family members and friends and neighbors and co-workers who are lost and do *not* know Christ, we cannot help but be witnesses to them. We cannot help but pray for them. We cannot help but do the deeds of love for them that Jesus did. And all of that is the process by which, as **Rom 8:29** says, we **“become conformed to the image of Christ.”**

If people are confirmed in their sin even though they have seen the character of Christ in us and even though they have heard the truth of God from us, that is part of God's plan. But we *never* know what people will do at the end. [KEN BENSON EXAMPLE]

Ken Benson's son probably prayed for his dad for decades. He never saw any fruit from those prayers until, by God's grace, his dad was on his deathbed. We all have people—family, friends, co-workers, government leaders, enemies like Islamic terrorists—we are praying for. Our passage today is reminding us, “Stay faithful.” Keep praying; keep witnessing; keep doing deeds of love and service in Christ's name. Remember, as God told Isaiah, “I have my remnant.” And if we are faithful, God will use us to bring that remnant to himself.

CONCL: God's people are the visible and audible presence of God in the world. That means us. How we live our lives and what we say will either draw people closer to Christ or will push people away from Christ. God has given us the commission to be his witnesses and make disciples. He has also given us the means to fulfill that commission: He has given us his Word; he has given us the Holy Spirit; and he has given us his body—the church—to equip and encourage and support us as we fulfill our commission.

Let's be faithful in fulfilling that commission. If we are, one day we will hear those glorious words, **“Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful in a little, now I will give you much. Enter into the joy of your Master.”**