

THE MILLENNIUM FORECAST

The Book of Isaiah

Text

Isaiah 6:1-13

Topic

Isaiah has his famous encounter with God in which the Seraphim takes a burning coal from the altar and touches his lips

Title

“Hot Lips”

You’ve heard of the prodigal son, but have you heard of the profligate son?

In the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy, we are introduced to him. *“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear”* (Deuteronomy 21:18-20).

(If your kids think your discipline is harsh, read ‘em this).

Does “gluttony” carry the death penalty? The word can be translated “profligate.” It means *utterly and shamelessly immoral or dissipated; thoroughly dissolute*. Some other words for dissipated and dissolute are debauched, decadent, licentious, promiscuous, lecherous, wanton, lustful, libidinous, lewd, unchaste, wild, unrestrained,

depraved, degenerate, corrupt... You get the idea. Definitely not talking about obesity.

In our text today, God tells Isaiah to, "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed" (v10).

It should startle us to hear that from God. What happened to "[desiring] all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (First Timothy 2:3-4)?

We saw, in chapters one through five, that Judah *utterly and shamelessly immoral and dissipated; thoroughly dissolute*. The nation had passed a point of "no repent."

Isaiah models a prodigal. He confesses his sins, and rededicates to God. If Isaiah thought of himself that way, *so ought we*.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Seek The Lord As If You Were His Prodigal**, and **#2 Seek The Lord Before You Become Profligate**.

#1 - Seek The Lord As If You Were His Prodigal (v1-8)

The parable of the prodigal son is found in the Gospel of Luke. A younger son asks his father for his inheritance early and then squanders it all in a distant country on riotous living. He comes to his senses and returns to his father's house. He is welcomed back by his father with open arms.

Is it going too far to think of Isaiah, and therefore ourselves, as prodigal? We may not be drunkards wallowing in a pig pen, but until we see Jesus, we continue to struggle with our unredeemed flesh.

We do not mature as Christians unless we become increasingly sensitive to our sin.

William Beveridge wrote, *"I cannot pray, except I sin. I cannot preach, but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of, and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ."*

True - *but don't wallow in that truth*. Alexander MacLaren wrote, *"Embrace in one act the two truths - thine own sin, and God's infinite mercy in Jesus Christ."*

Isaiah will be brought to woe, seeing his sinfulness. The effect is an eager, bold desire to serve the Lord.

Isa 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple.

Uzziah reigned 52yrs. He was a good king, until he wasn't. He decided that he could act as a priest. He tried to light incense in the Temple, which was a priest's duty and privilege. Before he could, he was struck with leprosy. The account in Second Chronicles reads, "when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to *his* destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD" (26:10).

Weakness is your strength. It humbles you to seek the Lord's help at all times. You might be familiar with the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel all night. Geno is teaching through Genesis on Wednesday nights. He said, "Jacob had incredible vigor. But if he was going to get to Israel, he could have no self-sufficiency. And so the Lord grabbed him."

When you think you are strong, physically, or spiritually, you are wrestling with God. Tap out yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is only when you know that you are weak that you are strong.

The first five chapters occur *after* Isaiah was called and commissioned. We needed to see Judah as profligate. Otherwise God's message for Isaiah seems a harsh over-reaction.

National transfer of power can be a turbulent time. Judah's throne might be empty, but God was seated on His far greater, more glorious, throne in Heaven.

Nations rage against one another and God. He remains in charge. His mighty providence, without violating man's free will, keeps His romance of redemption on track to the consummation of the age.

Isaiah was transported to the Temple in Heaven.

No one can see God in His fullness. Nevertheless a lot of Bible characters are said to have seen the Lord. He can accommodate us when necessary.

Isa 6:2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Isa 6:3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; The whole earth *is* full of His glory!"

"Seraphim" are an order of angels. This is their only appearance in the Bible. It's a doozy. Isaiah's description makes them sound weird, but like everything in Heaven, they are intensely beautiful. Why they cover their faces and feet, we are not told, so we won't speculate.

Heaven and the spirit realm are sort of a melting pot of spirit beings, good and evil. The ones we know some things about are Seraphim, Cherubim, Archangels, Angels, Principalities, Powers, Rulers of Darkness, Wicked Spirits, Thrones, Dominions, Spirits in Prison, Demons, and Seducing Spirits.

There is something called a Divine Council. We know, too, that there are horses in Heaven:

- There are the Four Horsemen in the Revelation.
- Jesus returns on a great white steed.
- We accompany Jesus on horses.

And don't forget - All dogs go to Heaven.

The three-fold repetition of "Holy," and God using the plural word "Us," are consistent with the Doctrine of the Trinity. There is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Stated differently, God is one in essence and three in person. These definitions express three crucial truths: (1) the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, (2) each Person is fully God, (3) there is only one God.

Isa 6:4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

Isaiah smelled, saw, heard, and felt these physical phenomena. There were doorposts, a structure, smoke. Heaven is tangible, permanent. Abraham and the other patriarchs lived on Earth looking towards it. We are going to retire there.

Isa 6:5 So I said: "Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

A friend of mine, Pastor Terry Michaels of Calvary Austin, tweeted, *"Ministry is the only vocation where feeling qualified becomes a disqualification."*

Embrace your insufficiency to do anything apart from grace. Just don't morbidly dwell on what a sinner you are. You are a *believing sinner*, justified by God.

Isa 6:6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar.

Isa 6:7 And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged."

The Tabernacle in the wilderness, and later Solomon's Temple, and later still Zerubbabel's Second Temple, were modeled after the one in Heaven.

There are two altars where this coal could have come from:

1. The Golden Altar standing in the Holy Place, called the Altar of Incense.
2. The Brazen Altar standing at the very entrance of the court and called the altar of the burnt offering.

Whichever one it was, the altar symbolizes the provision which God had made in the Temple and its services for sin. One commentator said, "The live coal expresses the ideas of atonement, propitiation, satisfaction, forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation. Isaiah is left in no doubt when the seraph explains: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged.' "

A substitute was sacrificed on the altar so that God could cleanse Isaiah. God did all the heavy lifting.

Isa 6:8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here *am I!* Send me."

John Gill wrote, *"This shows the true nature and effect of an application of pardon; it gives a man freedom and boldness in the presence of God, and stimulates to a ready and cheerful obedience to his will, and engages him with the utmost alacrity in his service."*

Isaiah the prodigal. I admit I've never thought of him that way. But it would seem **he** thought of himself that way, confessing his sin, and more than that - identifying with his profligate nation.

Christians are prodigals. We can take for granted our spiritual inheritance. We can leave our first love. We can be asleep in the light. We sometimes don't control our tongue. We can be hearers of the Word, not doers. We need from time to time to stir-up our gifts.

Get back to where you once belonged.

#2 - Seek The Lord Before You Become Profligate (v9-13)

Profligate is *not* a deeper state of prodigal.

- A prodigal is a son (or daughter), a *believing* sinner who has been declared righteous.
- A profligate is an *unbeliever*, a sinner not born again into the family of God.

When we say, "Seek the Lord before you become profligate," **we are warning unbelievers that there will come a time when it is too late for you to be saved.**

- It is always too late after you die.
- It can also be too late *before you die*. It was for Judah.

Isa 6:9 And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

Isa 6:10 "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."

Despite God's powerful Word, they remained *utterly and shamelessly immoral or dissipated; thoroughly dissolute*.

Unrepented sin dulled them until they become completely deaf and blind. John Fish writes, "It is entirely in keeping with the character of God, and it is the repeated teaching of Scripture, that those who are depraved and have continually hardened themselves to the light of God may justly be cut off by God and excluded from further light."

The apostle Paul warned of this in the first chapter of the New Testament Book of Romans. If unbelievers continue to ignore God's gracious attempts to save them, God will "give them over" (v24, 26, 28).

- J. B. Phillips says, "They gave up God. So God gave them up."
- The Message version is straightforward, "So God said, "If that's what you want, that's what you get."

Unbeliever, I beg you to listen carefully. Continue to resist God drawing you to Himself and, if you die in your sins, you will be consigned to an eternity of conscious suffering in the Lake of Fire.

There could come a time *before* you die when you can no longer repent and be saved. Most of Judah were examples to us.

Not everyone in Judah was dull to God. By His providence, God always has a remnant of believers.

Isa 6:11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?"...

Isaiah could only ask this if he knew and believed God would keep His promises to the Jews. It was not a matter of *if* He would keep His promises, but *when*.

The word "Israel" can be found over 2500 times in the Bible. It occurs 73 times in the New Testament. In all but three of those occurrences, it refers to national, ethnic Israel.

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes, "*The Church is never called, and is not, a 'spiritual Israel' or a 'new Israel.'* The term 'Israel' is either used of the nation or the people as a whole, or of the believing remnant within. It is never used of the Church in general or of Gentile believers in particular."

Christians tend to think of the Lord dealing one-on-one with individuals. He deals with nations as well:

- Today Israel as a nation is blinded (Second Corinthians 3:15).
- God is still saving individual Jews (Romans 11:1).

Isa 6:11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate,

Isa 6:12 The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land.

The punishment would last until “the land is utterly desolate.” Notice the emphasis on the land:

- The cities and houses upon the land will be abandoned.
- The citizens will be “removed... far away” from the land.
- Most of the land would be “forsaken.”

This would occur in the sixth century when King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah three times. The third time was bad. He destroyed the Temple, ruined the land, and took captives. What we call the Babylonian Captivity would last 70 years.

Why 70 years?

- The Jews were to observe a Sabbath day every seventh day of the week.
- They were supposed to observe a Sabbath year every seventh year, not planting crops, letting the land rest.
- Every 50th year was Jubilee. Besides not planting their crops, they were to release people from their debts, releasing all indentured servants, and return property to who owned it.

This wasn't a brilliant agricultural strategy. It was all about trusting YHWH. It took faith to let your rich farmland lay fallow. You were relying completely on God.

I like to point out how silly people have made Sabbath keeping. I ran across a crazy workaround the rabbi's came up with.

They devised the *heter mechira*. It is a sale permit which allows Jews to temporarily “sell” their land to non-Jews for the Sabbath year, so they may ignore it. So-called Sabbath ‘keepers’ always seems to find a way to keep it *without keeping it*.

God warned Israel if they did not keep that ordinance He would remove them from the land and enforce the Sabbath-rest law (Leviticus 26:34-35, 43).

The duration of the punishment was decided by the years they owed the Lord by not obeying the Sabbath of the land.

God wanted for His nation to enjoy Him and His promises, to rest in Him. He never meant for His Law to be a burden. The leaders made it hard and heavy.

It is God's desire we enjoy our relationship with Him. One of the early creeds begins, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, *and to enjoy Him for ever.*" One commentator said, "What could be more liberating, more thrilling, more amazing than that the God who made the universe would come to you, a hopeless sinner, and point you to the death of his Son where sins are paid for, and then say to you, "Your first and greatest obligation is that you enjoy supremely what is supremely enjoyable? Namely, me and my Son in the power of my Spirit."

Isa 6:13 But yet a tenth *will be* in it, And will return and be for consuming, As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump *remains* when it is cut down. So the holy seed *shall be* its stump."

A small portion, a 10th - **believers** - would be spared. Daniel and his three friends, for example. This 10th which survived the exile is compared to a tree. The tree will be cut down so that only the stump remains. From this stump comes the remnant.

God is often criticized for the wholesale slaughter of various nations in the Promised Land. Joshua was instructed to kill everyone, including animals. God had been striving with these various Gentile nations to repent of their wickedness. We know that they had heard the Word of God. The people of Jericho, for example, were terrified when the Israelites arrived.

- They were terrified because they knew God was with the Jews.
- They were terrified, but they would not repent.

Could they have repented? Rahab, the harlot, did, and she and her household were spared. The city was hardened against God. It was past the point of repentance. They refused the knowledge of God, and brought judgment upon themselves.

F. C. Jennings wrote, "*It seems like a strange and sad thing that the prophet Isaiah is sent to a blind, deaf, and hard-hearted people, yet we may safely say at once that God never hardens hearts that would otherwise be soft. He does not blind the eyes of those who would see.*"

Was Isaiah's ministry a failure? Quite the opposite:

- A remnant would be saved so that the Savior could be born.

- The dull, deaf, and blind response to his message was a witness they were profligates deserving judgment.

Isaiah spoke to them plainly. At one point the Jews say, "He speaks to us as though we were babies" (28:10). They willfully rejected the Word, so God gave them over, as promised.

Is it too late for the United States, as a nation? That will answer itself as time goes on. A case is easily made that our nation deserves God's judgment. Or to put it another way, it would be no surprise.

Isaiah received a truly awesome commission...But so do we.

Jesus told us to "Go!" with the Gospel, making disciples, until He comes for us. Plain and powerful, the Gospel transforms lives in every nation, people, tribe, and tongue.

Richard Watson explained, *"Not only is there the Word, and the ministry of it, but a special influence of the Spirit, as distinct both from one & the other. There is that operation of the Spirit by which men are put into a capacity to repent when they hear the Word."*

He is here, He is here, He is working among us. He is here, He is here and he wants to work a wonder.