

# ISAIAH

## Chapter Six

### Introduction

*The Divine Call for Missionaries* is the title Charles Spurgeon gave to his sermon on Isaiah 6:8. It's an appropriate title - so long as you broaden your understanding of the term "missionary."

Isaiah was sent out to be God's missionary. ***But he didn't go anywhere!*** He was sent out as a missionary **among his own people, in his own country.**

Everyday, everywhere you go is your mission field. If you are a believer, you can be a missionary.

I said "can be" because you are never forced to be God's missionary. God did not force Isaiah; He allowed him to hear the question. It was left up to Isaiah to volunteer.

God didn't direct His question to Isaiah personally. It was announced and recorded in the Bible for every believer to hear. It echoes throughout history; it is still being asked. The sense you should have is that you, too, are hearing it asked.

Isaiah was eager to volunteer. And we know from his biography that he endured as a volunteer - even to the point of martyrdom.

Where did his eagerness come from? How was he able to endure to the end? We'll organize our answers to those questions around two points: #1 Get A Vision Of Jesus And You'll Be Eager To Volunteer, and #2 Get Your Vitality From Jesus And You'll Endure As A Volunteer.

- #1 Get A Vision Of Jesus  
And You'll Be Eager To Volunteer  
(v1-8)

Before we begin you might be wondering why I am calling this a vision of Jesus. In the Gospel of John, in chapter twelve, these verses are quoted and applied to Jesus Christ. God on the throne in Isaiah Six was none other than the Lord, Jesus Christ, before His incarnation as a man.

Isaiah was God's prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah in the late eighth century and early seventh century BC. If we were studying through the entire book, chapter six might be the proper place to begin. Many scholars believe that this vision in chapter six is out of chronological order. The vision of Jesus actually occurred before the rest of the book, before Isaiah began his public ministry.

*"Whom shall I send? And who shall go for Us?"* Isaiah heard the question and responded with eagerness. You are hearing the question through Isaiah. You will respond with eagerness if you get a vision of Jesus.

Don't let this word "vision" throw you off. It is not something reserved for only a few super-spiritual saints. I'm using it in a less-supernatural, more ordinary sense. You, too, can and should have a vision of Jesus.

For sure, Isaiah "saw the Lord" in a supernatural, waking vision. Many of the Old Testament prophets had similar amazing experiences that you and I will never have. Saints in the New Testament also had such experiences, e.g., the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus and the apostle John on the Island of Patmos.

**Their experiences are recorded for you; their supernatural visions are yours to share as you study God's Word.**

Having said all that we are ready to begin looking at **eagerness** to volunteer. There are at least three prerequisites to eagerness: God's *holiness*, your *humility*, and Jesus Christ's *healing*.

Get a vision of God's **holiness**. His holiness is manifested in four ways: in *providence*, in *proclamation*, in *prophecy*, and in *power*.

God's holiness is manifested in His providence:

Isaiah 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.

It was a severe and tragic blow to Isaiah and to the southern kingdom of Judah that good King Uzziah died. But behind and above the throne on earth was and is "the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." This points to God's providence - the continuous activity of God by which He makes all events work-out His eternal purposes. To be sure, evil has entered the universe He created; but it is not allowed to thwart God's ultimate and eternal purposes.

In plain terms, God is always behind and above the events of **your** life. The tragedies never thwart His eternal purposes but He has promised you that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

God's holiness is manifested in proclamation:

Isaiah 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.

Isaiah 6:3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts..."

"Seraphim" appear only here in Scripture. They evidently are a special class of angelic beings. Their name means *burning ones*. They proclaim God's holiness in their *appearance...* by their *activity...* and in their *announcement*.

They appear with "six wings." Two cover their faces, indicating God is holy to look upon. Two cover their feet, indicating God is holy to wait upon.

With two wings they fly - indicating their readiness to act on behalf of God. They have a single announcement to make - that God is "holy, holy, holy."

Your eagerness is enhanced as you, too, consider your appearance... activities... and announcements:

1. Your "appearance" can include the way you look. For example: You don't want to be immodest. Appearance also has to do with not giving the appearance of evil.

2. Your "activities" are just that - the things you do and whether they represent holiness of life.
3. Your "announcements" are your words.

To put it another way: You won't be eager to volunteer if you can't proclaim God is "Holy, holy, holy" through your appearance, actions, and announcements.

God's holiness is manifested in prophecy:

Isaiah 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!"

This statement is always true regardless human events, but it is also a prophecy of the Lord's intention to physically return and rule the earth in His Second Coming. Keeping the biblical future in mind encourages an eagerness to be found doing the Lord's work when He returns.

God's holiness is manifested in His power:

Isaiah 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.

*Shaking* and *smoke* are symbols of the Lord's almighty power. He is able to accomplish all that He has set out to do.

Your **humility** is a prerequisite to eagerness:

Isaiah 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."

Humility is an honest assessment of your true condition. It is not thinking more highly of yourself than you should. Isaiah understood that he was both "undone" and "unclean." So are you and so is everyone else.

"Undone" has several meanings: *cut-off, perish, silenced, destroyed*. It is a word that describes what you deserve - to be cut-off from God to perish eternally.

"Unclean" describes why you deserve to be undone. You are a sinner. You "dwell in the midst of" other sinners - the whole human race.

Only the humble get a true vision of God. You must see yourself as you really are.

Jesus Christ's **healing** is a prerequisite to eagerness:

Isaiah 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.

Isaiah 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."

There were two altars in the Jewish tabernacle - one in the outer court upon which animals were sacrificed and one in the holy place upon which incense was burned. The "altar" in this vision corresponds to the altar of incense.

All the furniture in the Jewish tabernacle prefigures Jesus Christ. The altar of sacrifice prefigures His death on the cross as the final sacrifice for sin. The altar of incense prefigures His role as your Great High Priest ministering on your behalf continually before God.

Touching Isaiah's lips with the burning coal is said to take away his "iniquity," or guilt, and "purge" his "sin." It is a picture of the spiritual healing that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

God is "holy, holy, holy." You are *sinful, sinful, sinful!* If you trust in His sacrifice you will be touched by His grace and have your iniquity taken away and your sin purged. You will be able to volunteer - and you will do so with eagerness.

Isaiah was ready for the question:

Isaiah 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*!! Send me."

I should point out the phrase, "**who will go for Us?**" is an indication that God exists as One God but as more than one person. It doesn't go so far as to explicitly tell you God is a trinity but it puts you on notice that there is a plurality in the God of the Bible.

"*Here am I! Send me*" is the only reasonable response. Any reluctance on your part is an indication that you have a problem with holiness or humility or healing.

One more observation about eagerness to volunteer before we move on. Isaiah was not given his job description until *after* he volunteered! Volunteering is never about the work itself. It is an eager availability for anything the Lord might ask of you.

## #2 Get Your Vitality From Jesus And You'll Endure As A Volunteer (v9-13)

Studies about Isaiah's divine call to mission work often stop at this point. They don't go on to reveal the fact that his mission was to deliver a message that would not be received! From our human vantage point Isaiah would have an unsuccessful ministry.

Here is the message:

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

Isaiah 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."

The Jews *could* believe, but they *would not* believe. They had passed a point of spiritual reception. Still, to emphasize His mercy even to a stubborn and rebellious people, God spoke to them through Isaiah.

This was a tough assignment! No minister wants to have these results. We always think in terms of measurable success. Numbers, for example, become our main criteria. How many people attend? How many respond? Especially, how much do they give?

Success ought to be measured by your faithfulness to perform the task or tasks Jesus assigns to you. It doesn't really involve the response you receive from those you are among.

Jesus gave His disciples - and us - the Parable of the Sower. After all was said and done, there was only one group out of four that responded positively to the message of the Word of God.

In Second Corinthians 2:15-16, the apostle Paul wrote,

2 Corinthians 2:15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

2 Corinthians 2:16 To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?

Now you can understand the emotional depth of Isaiah's question in verse eleven:

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

"How long?" is often a very desperate question when we ask it of God. "How long?" will my suffering last... "How long?" before something good happens... "How long?" will I be asked to **endure**.

In Isaiah's case, he would be asked to **endure to the end**:

Isaiah 6:11 ...And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate,

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

The words describe the downfall of the southern kingdom of Judah at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews would be taken captive for seventy years and their land would lie desolate.

Isaiah, by the way, would not live to see it. Church history records that King Manasseh of Judah had him put inside a hollow tree trunk and sawn in two.

Isaiah was given only this word of hope to encourage his ministry:

Isaiah 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."

God would preserve a remnant of His people; He would keep all of His unconditional promises to the Jews. Outwardly it would look like a tree cut-down with only a stump remaining! Severe discipline was determined against God's people - and Isaiah was the messenger.

Isaiah endured to the end - even to his martyrdom. It speaks to us of a supernatural vitality that comes from getting the proper vision of the Lord.

We are fond of saying that God's Word contains within it God's enabling. His enabling guarantees your endurance since it is never by your might nor by your power that you serve once you volunteer; it is by the Spirit of the Lord.

People often speak of getting "burned-out." I understand; I've been burned-out. When I am burned-out, it must be because I am working in my own might and power. You can never exhaust the Spirit of God! God can never "burn-out" as He lives in and through you. Instead of talking about how burned-out you get as a volunteer, you ought to be burning-up, on fire for the Lord.

#### Conclusion

I know this was a vision... But it wouldn't surprise me if Isaiah's lips were literally blistered from his burns as he delivered God's message.

Perhaps not. Maybe it's just symbolic. Isaiah's ministry was a preaching ministry so the emphasis was on his lips. His lips needed to be blistered by the burning of God's Word.

Whatever your ministry, **get blistered!** I'm not talking about the blisters that come from the work itself... But about the blistering that comes from getting a vision of Jesus.