**The Book of Isaiah**

Lesson 8 – Isaiah 6:8-13: Isaiah’s Commission by the Holy God

1. Having looked at Isaiah’s vision of the Holy God last week, our section tonight gets to the purpose of why this vision was revealed to Isaiah. God appeared in glorious majesty to Isaiah in order to call or commission him as a prophet.
2. But God accomplishes this calling through an unusual means. God asks the question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Does this mean God is need of volunteers and He doesn’t know who’s going to step up and volunteer? Or is God asking a rhetorical question in order to elicit a response from Isaiah? The testimony of Scripture is that it is the latter.
3. Notice also that God uses the same language of Genesis 1 in using the first person plural, “us.” Some scholars believe that this is God deliberating with the heavenly council of angels, but I think it’s better that we see both here and in Genesis 1 a shadowy glimpse of God as Trinity, which is more fully revealed in the New Testament. There is a plurality of persons (“us”), but it is only 1 figure that Isaiah sees on the throne – 1 God, 3 persons.
4. Isaiah having seen the majesty of God and experienced the grace of God, immediately responds, asking God to send and use him. E.J .Young describes this as “the readiness of true faith.” Previously, Isaiah saw himself as destroyed before the holy majesty of God. Now that he has assurance of the forgiveness of his sins, he is ready.
5. So, Isaiah is willing to serve the Lord, even before he knows exactly what the Lord wants him to do. And his task is going to be quite a challenge based on verses 9-10. Isaiah is told by God to preach His words of judgment to them and God tells Isaiah that they will not listen to his preaching. Isaiah is told this his preaching of God’s words, rather than bringing revival and the conversion of many, is going to keep them in their hardened state, remaining blind, deaf, and insensitive. As Tim Chester puts it, “The more Isaiah speaks, the more opposed to God people will become.” The more the light of God’s word shined brightly, the more blinded they would be.
6. Brevard Childs writes, “The prophet is to be the executor of death, the guarantor of complete hardening. His very proclamation is to ensure that Israel will not turn and repent.” This is what verse 10 says. Isaiah’s labors of the ministry of the Word of God will continue to keep sinful Judah hardened so there will be no possibility of its being saved. It’s as if the preaching of God’s Word will smear their eyes to keep them from seeing, plug their ears with wax to keep them from hearing, and make their heart so “dull” (literally, “fat”), that is calloused over so as not to understand the message of God’s Word. They will hear God’s Word repeatedly, yet not be converted, because the gift of seeing their sin and themselves as sinners will be withheld from them by God. There will be no positive response to Isaiah’s ministry.
7. Now this seems to go against the description of God in other places of Scripture, such that He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), that He commands all people to repent (Acts 17:30). How do we resolve this seeming inconsistency between God’s desire for people to be saved, and divine hardening? Calvin writes, “We ought not to think it strange if God punishes the wickedness of men by blinding them in the highest degree. Yet the Prophet shows, a little before, that the blame of this blindness lies with the people; for when he bids them hear, he bears witness that the doctrine is fitted for instructing the people, if they choose to submit to it; that light is given to guide them, if they will but open their eyes. The whole blame of the evil is laid on the people for rejecting the amazing kindness of God.” Let’s not forget that this is not the first time Israel has heard and been instructed in the Word of God. They knew their history that God gave them over to enemies when they sinned, but heard and restored them when they repented. Yet, now the time for repentance is past as they have rejected the scriptures and the opportunity to repent many times over. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 says that those who are perishing refused to love the truth so “God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” The consistent testimony of Scripture is that man chose to sin against God in Adam, therefore God gives His Spirit to those whom He elected in eternity past for salvation, and He withholds His Spirit from those whom He has created for destruction, yet it is not God who is responsible but man is responsible for his own sin. God hardens the heart of the non-elect, yet He is not the author of sin and not held responsible for man’s sin. To a degree, there is great mystery here in that we cannot fully comprehend God’s ways and thoughts which are higher than ours (Isa 55:8). All of the following are true statements and doctrine from Scripture: God hardens whom He will. God is not the author of sin. Man is judged for his own sin.
8. Of course, Isaiah doesn’t relish the fact this his kindred will be kept like this, so he naturally asks God how long God will keep the people in their hardened, deaf, dumb, and blind state (v11a). To which God responds that it will be until Israel and Judah have been defeated and exiled (vv11b-12). Here we see that even know Isaiah knows they are hardened and will continue to be hardened, he is still concerned for the people. How long must I proclaim a Gospel of hardening to my people? For 60 or so years.
9. Verse 13 is incredibly difficult to translate as seen from the examples below. Some translations take it negatively, while others take it positively. I favor the positive view because naturally, we would all feel discouraged at such a prospect, so rather than letting that be the final word, verse 13 is a word of hope after receiving a message of a long ministry of preaching to a hardened people. There is still life in the stump. There’s still an elect remnant who will positively respond to the Word of God and the Messiah will still come from the people of God.
	1. NKJV (positive) – “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.”
	2. NIV 1984 (positive) – “And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”
	3. NET Bible (negative) – “Even if only a tenth of the people remain in the land, it will again be destroyed, like one of the large sacred trees or an Asherah pole, when a sacred pillar on a high place is thrown down. That sacred pillar symbolizes the special chosen family.”
	4. E.J. Young translation (positive) – “And yet there shall be still in it a tenth; it shall again become wasting like the terebinth and like the oak which in their fallen state have substance in them, the holy seed is their substance.”

**Application:**

1. EJ Young says that in Isaiah 6:8 “we find the reason so few are willing to serve God.” It is because the law which brings conviction of sin is not preached and we need conviction of sin then the knowledge that our Redeemer has borne our sin before we are able to joyfully serve the Lord. We need the Law and the Gospel both preached and proclaimed not only from the pulpits but also in our own testimony.
2. Isaiah went into the prophetic ministry of the Word of God knowing full well that he was preaching to stony soil and he went and did it faithfully, knowing full well what the “results” of his ministry would be. We have not been given that foresight by divine revelation, nevertheless pastors are still called to faithfully proclaim “Thus says the Lord” and leave the “results” up to the Lord. As Warren Wiersbe says, “The test of ministry is not outward success but faithfulness to the Lord.” E.J. Young goes on to say, “From this we learn the necessity for continuing in the work of the gospel, even when outward success does not appear to attend our work. It may be that apparent lack of outward success is in part due to our own inefficiency; our task, however, is to be faithful. May God grant that His church may have ministers who, above all else, are faithful, even as was Isaiah.”
3. Faithful ministers are not only called to preach faithfully and leave the results to God, but also to have love and concern for the people. Young says, “On the one hand, natural affection toward those to whom one must preach will prevent a cold and harsh, or even cruel presentation of the truth. On the other, natural feelings and affections must not prevent the minister from declaring the entire truth. And the deepest, the truest, the most sincere and earnest love for the people to whom we minister will be shown only when we declare to them in loving, yet firm, fashion the whole counsel of God. Genuine love to our people demands that we tell them the truth.”
4. Calvin comments on this same idea: “Although our labor appear to be fruitless, and men rush forward to their destruction, and become more rebellious, we must go forward; for we do nothing at our own suggestion, and ought to be satisfied with having the approbation of God. We ought, indeed, to be deeply grieved when success does not attend our exertions; and we ought to pray to God to give efficacy to his word. A part of the blame we ought even to lay on ourselves, when the fruits are so scanty; and yet we must not abandon our office, or throw away our weapons. The truth must always be heard from our lips, even though there be no ears to receive it, and though the world have neither sight nor feeling; for it is enough for us that we labor faithfully for the glory of God, and that our services are acceptable to him; and the sound of our voice is not ineffectual, when it renders the world without excuse.”
5. John 12:41, after quoting from Isaiah 6:10 about the hardening of Israel, says that Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory and spoke of Him. John sees a Pre-Incarnate Messiah sitting on the throne of God which is more Scriptural evidence of the divinity of Jesus against all who would want to make Him less than God. Additionally, Isaiah’s ministry is a type and forerunner of the ministry of the Messiah. Isaiah 6:9-10 is quoted in Matthew 13 to describe Jesus’ teaching in parables. Jesus is recapitulating the ministry of Isaiah through His teaching in parables which reflects the use of the vineyard parable in Isaiah 5. Jesus’ teaching in parables was to keep those who are divinely hardened in that state of hardening, while also revealing truth to those to whom God opened their eyes, just like in Isaiah’s day.
6. Paul references Israel’s hardening in Romans 11:7-10. Although Paul is quoting from Isaiah 29, it is the same idea of God not giving ears to hear and eyes to see the truth of God’s message. He also references divine hardening in 2 Corinthians 3:14-16. A veil lays over the hearts of the Israelites in Paul’s day and their minds are “hardened” and only through Christ can the veil be removed and the mind softened. Though this may be a difficult doctrine for us to accept, we see through both the Old and New Testaments that the ultimate reason unbelievers do not believe is because God has hardened their hearts. WCF 5.6 on God’s providence says, “As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, doth blind and harden, from them He not only withholds His grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts….and gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God uses for the softening of others.” Think of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart. Think of Jeremiah’s imagery of the potter and the clay in Jeremiah 18 which Paul picks up in Romans 9. Brevard Childs writes, “The mystery of divine hardening cannot be explained by shifting the initiative to Israel, as if hardening were only an idiom describing how Israel hardened its own heart by disobedience. It is constitutive of biblical hardening that the initiative is placed securely with God in the mystery of his inscrutable will.”