

"LIFE'S MOST EMBARRASSING QUESTION - WHO WILL GO?"

Isaiah 6:1-11

We are concerned with one of the most significant aspects of the human life - our representative capacity. We all have powers that stand for something. We can use these powers, and yet hardly anyone uses his powers to his fullest. Jesus reported to his Disciples, and he said "Ye shall be my witnesses." He is making, that is, a direct definite appeal to their representative capacity. A call - who will go? Although, he says, you can be more than yourselves. You have the power to stand for the highest principles and the greatest enterprise of your generation. And you can be more influential in power, and you can identify with something that is greater than yourself. And when the people think of you, they will think of that. Ye shall be my witnesses.

Did you know, you have a capacity to be a representative of God? A newborn baby is a baby only - but even in the early years of development--he begins to accumulate suggestions of achievement and distinction of ambition. And he finally comes to identify himself with what he stands for. Now this is not come as a mighty act. But, it lifts us up to a greatness that we can stand for the greatest things. We have a capacity to do this.

Lincoln was a man of lowly origin, small opportunities. He had no special graces. He was plain. But it shows for what a man is able to stand for. That is one of the marvels of history. That is one of the marvels of the devotion of the spiritual life. It is one of the marvels of liberty in a nation. People come to the place that they stand for something.

As we come to the beginning of the summer months, as the days will be ahead of harvest, and the gracious in-gathering before us. And we want to know what God has to say to us. Can we hear what he has to say? And the passage of Scripture that we have chosen, is one that is all so familiar.

Katherine Marshall entered the room shortly after her husband, Peter, died. She asked to be alone for a few minutes to try to comprehend what had happened. She says that the presence of God filled the room with an awesome peace.

That seems to point to the thing that we are talking about in Isaiah here. As Isaiah finds himself alone with God and he hears a voice.

The passage is very familiar to us. In the middle of the 9th verse there is a revelation of a great principle. After that, we have a commission spoken to Isaiah concerning his own time. He was commissioned to utter a message, of judgement. Now we are not commissioned to utter that message. That Isaiah uttered. The local incident occupied about the last half of this chapter. And the essential and the eternal part of it is found in the first part.

V, I
The opening words of this passage fits on the history of the Hebrew people. It recounts in the year that King Uzziah died, The reign of Uzziah over Judah which had lasted for 52 years was over. And his son, Jotham, was about to succeed on the throne. Isaiah was suffering under the fearfulness of a military regime, Shallum came to the throne by the murder of his predecessor.

Menahem came to the throne by the murder of Shallum.

Pekahiah succeeded his father but was murdered by Pekah. And now Pekah was on the throne reigning over a people who were soon to be scattered.

The history of the reign of Uzziah had been remarkable in many respects. When he ascended the throne 52 years before, he was a youth of 16 years. He had set himself to seek God. And the period of history was remarkable in its prosperity. He had conducted a series of victorious campaigns against the enemies of God. He had restored much lost territory. Following these, he had developed a nation building towers, making cisterns, planting of vineyards, cultivating the land, increasing farming. It was a wonderful reign in every part.

Then his heart was lifted up and he became a man who was victorious over the perils of adversity. He was overcome by the perils of prosperity. We might say here, this could be a good lesson to us for today. He became a rebel against God. He was smitten with leprosy and for the last part of his life he lived in a leper's house. At last he died.

At this point in history, there came to Isaiah the son of Amoz, the vision recounted in this chapter. He had lived in Judah, he had no occupant of the throne of his own people, other than the king, who had now passed away. In the economy of God's time, there had arrived a definite time for public ministry in his life. In this wonderful passage, we have the story of how Isaiah was set apart. There are many things that we might say about this. That brought about life's most embarrassing question. There is first of all, I would say a great vision. And second of all, there is a great voice that speaks. And then, finally, the embarrassing question and the reasons for it.

I. THE VISION

- V. 1 - There is an outstanding word - I saw the Lord.
- V. 5 - We have the answer to that - then I said, woe is me!
- V. 8 - We have the understanding words of the second vision. I heard the voice of the Lord. And the last part of the same verse - here am I.

As you take these simple sentences and you outline them as a study, I saw the Lord. Then said I, I heard the voice of the Lord. Then said I, a vision and a voice. And in that order, first the vision - with all that it meant to the revelation of the soul of this man. Of truth concerning God, and truth concerning himself.

This vision of God led to a cleansing. And then, not until the voice, whom shall I send?

So first the vision and then the voice.

First the personal relationship to essential life and love - and then the commission comes. If I am to do anything for my master today, tomorrow, and the next day - I must have this vision. I must hear this voice. My answer to the vision must be Isaiah's answer. And my answer to the voice must be his also.

Therefore, let us examine the vision what did Isaiah see?

The first thing that is impressed upon the mind in the study of this passage - is that the prophet saw an occupied throne. He saw the Lord sitting upon

the throne high and lifted up. And his train filled the temple. This was the first truth that broke upon the soul of the prophet. With such terrific force and power, that he spoke as though he had never seen the vision before. As a matter of fact, this man had long seen the man high and lifted up. But the empty throne was the occasion that really captivated his soul.

Note first about this vision, in the year that king Uzziah died. The news spread in the streets. From town to town, village to village, the king was dead. There came to Isaiah the sense of loss. In the passing of the king, chaos was everywhere. Israel was in a terrible condition. Judah was following hard and fast. And there was the same disaster and defeat. The one throne to which Isaiah had looked for support was empty.

There was the feeling that came to the heart of the prophet, when the throne of Judah was empty, who now would succeed? Then in the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne. Behind the empty throne, there is a throne that is never empty.

Over the chaos that somehow puts fear in our hearts, there is a God of order and government who is always occupying his throne.

If you cross-examine Isaiah, he would have been unable to describe the personality on which his eyes rested. A person was manifested to him through the whole book of Isaiah there is presented a personality that startles us. That somehow is robed in splendor, girded with strength, and the government is sitting upon his shoulders. A personality that is stripped, wounded, bruised, suffering.

A king reigning in righteousness and being persecuted from the end of the ages.

A man who is broken in so many ways - who has believed our report. And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed. There is a vague shadowy outline, never quite so clear until we come to the New Testament. When we have the New Testament, we can find that person - Isaiah's first vision, though vague perfectly describes.

I saw the Lord.

The second thing about the vision is - he describes the central person.

r.2- To that of the surrounding facts, seraphim - flaming glory. Smoke, thunder, and the maintenance of a song. But the person is mentioned and left. I saw the Lord. The essential truth is, that a person was on the throne.

There is a very beautiful connection between this and the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John. And the whole prophecy of Isaiah - it is the chapter of Jesus over-shadowed by the cross. The first incident is that of Mary coming very near to his grief. And breaking the alabaster box of ointment upon his feet.

The second incident is, his entrance to Jerusalem. With a final triumph. All full of sorrow.

The third incident is the coming of the Greeks - the cross is everywhere. It was the shadow of the cross that drew forth the adoring worship of Mary, and filled her own eyes with tears as he rode into Jerusalem. And he made the reply when the Greeks asked him, to see him, accept a gain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone.

Look at V. 41 in this chapter, those things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory. What said, Isaiah, Lord, who hath believed our report. These things said Isaiah because he saw his glory. Isaiah's conception V. 53 of the misery and the agony is tremendous. When did he see his glory. When he was commissioned for his work. When he answered the most embarrassing question of life. I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up. The first time the prophet ever went forth to work was something that the vision of an enthroned God - the Judah's throne was empty. Chaos was everywhere, but here was someone who had a throne that had been filled.

Another thing in the vision - it speaks about surrounding glory. The seraphims, the flames of fire. The host of the mighty high God. The six winged seraphims. In the presence of his personality. With two wings they veiled their faces and with two they veiled their feet with two they were perpetually flying. Of course, symbolic. The face is the symbol of intellectual understanding. The feet, a symbol of government procedure. The wings symbolic of divine activity which had been inspired. And this unveiled the nature of the enthroned one. The burning spirit that surrounded the throne. Talks about activity. They veiled their faces unable to come to the perfect intellectual understanding of the mystery of the being. They veiled their feet, for while they are principalities, dominions, and rulers, they must be in submission to his throne.

V, 3
 He says, there is a song a two-fold song. First the song of the nature. Of the enthroned one "Holy, holy, holy." Is the Lord of hosts.

Then it is a song about earth. I am always thankful that when we read about this, it is a song about the earth, and the presence of Jehovah God revealed here personally. What is this that they sing of the earth. "The whole

Psalm 104

earth is full of his glory. " If you will notice here, the fullness of the whole earth is his glory. This spirit, these spirits that surround the throne look down to the earth, and see God's glory in it.

Isaiah had a different vision of it presently. And these spirits saw his vision also. They are singing in the presence of God, the ultimate triumph of truth. Singing by faith and hope in the presence of God. Of the victory that is to be. The whole earth is full of his glory. The great psalm of the king, which describes this procedure, to ultimate victory. Ends with the words of the seraphims which they sang in the presence of God. The whole earth is full of his glory.

V.4

The very thresholds were moved. The house was filled with smoke. We saw be perfectly correct if we translate this word smoke, by anger in Psalm 80:4.

" Oh Jehovah, God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people." The translation is how long will (thou smoke) against the prayer of thy people. It shows smoke as a symbol of anger. In the day of God's activity, it is said that the ancient prophet Joel that there should be blood and fire and pillars of smoke. And Isaiah in that high presence, saw the uplifted God upon his throne, and saw the burning spirits around the throne, veiling their faces. Ceaselessly moving to do his bidding, hearing the song of ultimate victory, and there was trembling of things in the temple of God. There was the filling of the house with smoke. Typical of God's anger. So this man stood in the midst of the awful vision, conscious of God's holiness, and God sitting on a throne.

V.5

How did he answer the vision? The answer was (not) a prepared one. The great words of the man speaking in the presence of God, either about God or to God, words that came surging out of a deep consciousness. Words that were spoken

and could be used by other men. As he stood in the glory of God in that moment of the vision.

The suddenness in which that (embarrassing question) came! Is something that we need to pause and to go deeper in. There is a story about the adventures of Robinson Crusoe. How long it has captivated the hearts of readers - perhaps it is because everyone has probably dreamed at some time of being cast upon some island Paradise. Crusoe, a master of resourcefulness, set out to provide himself with food and shelter to sustain life. He trapped goats, until he had his own herd. He built the lodging for warmth and protection. Hours were spent in exploring the island for food. His total activity was determined by the fact that he was alone on the island. Suddenly one day, he discovered a (footprint) in the sand. He was not alone after all! Now his whole concept had changed. This little island was not as solitary as he had assumed.

In Isaiah is the moving account of a man who living in a secure (circle) of royalty, suddenly discovers the imprint of God's presence in his own life. In a moment of all of the changes, the king died. His plans, his commitments, his whole future must undergo drastic revisions.

V. 8 Isaiah is made acutely aware of God. And of an embarrassing question - (who will go for us?

(It reads, who will go to this people? Who will go and teach? is another translation of this. Although this passage has been the basis of many missionary sermons. I want to say to you that the immediate context reminds us this is a call

to witness right where you are. Isaiah is not even asked to go across the street! He will not even have to leave Jerusalem for a weekend! The call is to stand for God in the same city where he lived since his birth. He hears God's question.

For a number of reasons now, this question is an embarrassing question.

Just First, because of his past sins. V. 5. Here is a man who stood in the midst of glory. And cries in agony, "woe is me for I am undone". A man of unclean lips. And I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips. Which means that when the prophet had a clear vision of God, he had a true vision of man. And with a clear vision of the divine, he had a clear vision of human disaster. I want you to notice that this cry concerning himself, proceeds from effect cause. The effect is, woe is me. The reason of the woe is, I am undone. The reason of being undone, I am a man of unclean lips.

You cannot see the holiness of God without also seeing your personal sinfulness! A person who claims a personal experience of faith, but whose life continues in complacent, self-righteousness, is deceived!

His first thought is, of his own unworthiness, and then he said - woe is me.

Suddenly, Isaiah sees that his private life has not been private at all!

Rather it has been going on in the very midst of God's throne room!

The angelic announcement that Isaiah has a new concept now of the whole earth is full of His glory - V. 3.

Why unclean lips, only. Why did he not say unclean heart, Why did he not say unclean spirit. The language is symbolic and is the most simple symbolism.

Let us turn over to the Epistle James 3:6 - the tongue is affire. The world of iniquity among our members is the tongue. Which defileth the whole body, setteth on fire the wheels of nature, and is set on fire by Hell. For every kind of beast, birds, and creeping things - and things in the sea is tamed and hath been tamed by mankind. But the tongue cannot - can no man tame, it is a restless evil. It is full of deadly poison.

As in the divine, the word is the expression of the God. So in the human, the speech of man is the expression of man. And the lips and the tongue are the instruments of speech. Man standing in the presence of glory confesses that his lips are polluted.

Let Jesus speak - the things which proceed out of the mouth, come out of the heart. And they defile the man. Within it is a fountain - head of corruption. But it is poured out and expressed through the lips.

His lips have been given to political causes, to secular causes, but not to God's cause. Perhaps Isaiah was like some of our contemporary politicians.

Who feel they must use enough vulgarity to appeal to the man in the street and enough Scripture to satisfy the people of God.

No doubt Isaiah had been involved with many people in whose eyes he had lost respect. Now he is asked to be a witness to them of God's righteousness.

But he says, I am undone, I am unclean. That is a great evidence of the grace of God. The amazing grace. But it is evidence that God's grace is able to save. If God consents to use you, then he can qualify you.

Have you ever stood in the glory and found out how unworthy you were! Even to utter God's message. Every day I am more astonished that God should use me at all.

V.I.S
Perhaps, as we think about it, are we ready to be reminded that in our homes and in other places, in our businesses, that we do not welcome God. Yet, the excuse of being unfit is not acceptable. For God offers a way of cleansing. One of the angelic beings touches Isaiah's unclean lips. With a live coal from the altar of fire, and signifies the cleansing power of God.

Therefore, the embarrassing question - who will go. Was embarrassing because of his past sins.

II. BECAUSE OF HIS PAST BLINDNESS

Second 1 - I think another embarrassing thing about this is the sudden realization of his past blindness. When Isaiah finally becomes aware of God's holy presence, he is overwhelmed that he has not been able to see. That here he stands and I wish to emphasize this. We have tried to look at the glory of God. And then here is a sense of his unworthiness. And flew one of the seraphims. Taking in his hand one of the sacred vessels from the altar and the place of the blood and the fire, and catching a burning coal - he comes to that man.

And Isaiah has been blind to this. But here is perfect cleansing and energizing provided. The overwhelming and the awful glory of God comes and the enthroned God surrounds him with burning spirits with worship. Do you hear the thunder of the seraphim as they sing. Can you hear anything else. I think I do. God can. What did he hear. God heard the cry of a guilty man. Oh soul of mine, take heart. One guilty man is crying out in the consciousness of his sin. He is fainting because his human soul is polluted and this rises up to the ears of God. Above the thunder of the seraphim. And here in the place of worship - the human soul has a need. And these are divine measurements that we are thinking about. And he brought a live coal and touched the lips of the man. He touched that which the man had made the symbol of his own uncleanness. This man had said, I am undone. I am blind because I have unclean lips. And the seraphim touched the lips - and he said, lo, thou hast touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged. This is a great case that can be translated "Thy crookedness has been taken away. Fire has straightened out these things. But something more -- thy sin is purged. Sin is offense - it is guilt. It is the thing in a man that comes out of his iniquity and his relationship to God. What of that. It is purged. And the Hebrew word means thy sin expiated. In the word that the Hebrew uses for that refers to atonement. The word which means to cover over. Not a sense of covering over a polluted thing. But it means this - to atone and to blot it out. Thy sin against the high glory of

V.7

Heaven, has been blotted out. Thy personal crookedness is straightened out. Your guilt has been expiated.

And how was it done? Simply by the coal of the fire from the altar. And only the Almighty God can deal with Isaiah in his uncleanness except by the coal of fire from the altar.

What follows that. I do not know, But I think there must have been a pause - a waiting moment. He was undone no longer. His lips were no longer impure. But it purified. He was waiting no longer for further direction. He had seen the voice of God. The vision of God.

V. 8
And now the voice - the voice had come to him with that embarrassing question - who will go? Whom shall go? And who will go for us. God is asking for volunteers. God needs someone to be sent. Someone who will go. The question is, who is ready to be sent. And who will go forward. The question is not go - but on for us. Who will be ready when I send them.

And then thank God, notwithstanding, this man a moment ago had expressed his consciousness of pollution. Immediately came with an answer - here am I, send me. And that is abandonment. Send me. Until his lips had been touched by the altar - the vision cursed him. But the fire cleansed him. And he came to say that he was at the disposal of God. But it was an embarrassing question because he had been blind. How often it is that men see clearly for the first time through tears. The telescope may intensify our awareness of the distant Heavens. But through tears sometimes, they make us aware of Heaven about us.

King Uzziah had died after ruling 50 years. Probably Uzziah might have been kin to Isaiah. Isaiah had lived and worked in the midst of the royal court. And no doubt depended upon the great king. The king had done much for the nation - perhaps only second to David, in that respect. Recorded in 2 Chron. 26. Indicates that in late life, Uzziah was filled with pride and played the part of a priest instead of confessing his transgression - he was angry with the priest and he warned him of his action. In the heat of wrath, he was stricken with leprosy - and he spent the last years in a leper colony. Suddenly Isaiah realizes that no matter what man sits on throne, the real king of kings is the Lord. To trust in him is to put your hopes in a buried coffin. But to trust in God, you have an everlasting power.

How often have I stood with families in time of death, and seen them receive their sight! much as Isaiah did. Sometimes only death can show people that there is more to life than carefree pleasures and earthly riches. "In our brightly lighted festivities, we would never see the stars, unless from time to time - God turned out the lights. And took us by the hand, and brought us over to the window to gaze at the stars. "

Third Another reason this question was embarrassing - in the third place, is because the task is undesirable. V. 10. The call to stand for righteousness in the midst of one's hometown, is an undesirable task. Isaiah, a wealthy man perhaps, a man of position accustomed to walking in the king's court. With the upper class. No doubt because of his royal rank, he has become a popular figure at all of the gala festivities of the court. Now he is asked, to become unpopular. To become a fly in the ointment. He must stand as a messenger of God and confront his friends of a lifetime - with the reality of their ungodliness. He must call them to repentance.

Now adding to this undesirable task, is the promise that Isaiah's ministry will

V. 10
 be a thankless one. He will often see his sermons wasted on dull ears, blind eyes, hard hearts. V. 10 - Make the heart of the people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

This is God's way of telling Isaiah that his witness will often merely result in the hardening of the hearts as people reject God's message. His task was to be really fruitless. Great crowds will not flock and respond to your sermons.

V. 11
 In the light of God's warning about the difficulty, to which Isaiah called, is a summons. We hear the prophet's natural response! Then said our Lord, how long. Sooner or later, every faithful disciple asks this question. "When faced with the uncaring, the unmoving audiences, when confronted by those who are refrigerated with selfishness, in the world - that warm up only to earthly lusts. We can ask, how long Lord must we continue. The answer is always the same - until the cities be wasted.

V. 11-12
Without inhabitants. The houses without men. The land utterly desolate. And the Lord moved men far away. And there is a great forsaking in the midst of the land. V. 11-12. God expects us to serve him as long as there is life. As long as there remains one solitary person. The only way to graduate from this roll as a witness is to die.

The task is necessary - whether men listen or not. Our responsibility to see, that they have an opportunity to decide, Jesus himself attracted only a meager minority. This is in no way, to brand him a failure. But you who do find life will make all the efforts worthwhile.

V. 8
18
 The final thing about this question - may be embarrassing. Because of the personal aspect of it. V. 8. Regardless of how large the crowd we are in - when God speaks it is always on a private individual basis. Isaiah realized that he is an audience of one. And God is asking who will yield to his call. Isaiah is the only one addressed. God is asking him to be a part of the working of the unseen kingdom. He is asking him to labor in an unseen and eternal way.

This is the whole law of service. In order to do successful service I need first the vision of God's enthronement. How have you had this vision of God. If you are not quite sure whether God's throne is real before you - you had better retire.

You remember God's method of sifting an army. It was a wonderful method. 32,000 came out and said - we are all ready. And the first test was, let the men fearful and afraid - go home. 22,000 men turned right around and marched home. Are you sure that was not a mistake. No, for in the day of battle - the man who has fear in his heart is a peril. When the victory was won - they all came back to shout and God blessed them. And when we are fighting - we do not want them.

Can we see God on his throne. This is the question. We can ^{see} chaos. We can see confusion. We can see a nation out of hand. We can see the economy going bankrupt day by day.

We are very blind if we cannot. National corruption. Municipal rottenness. People fooling with the problems of poverty. That ought to be the problem of every statemen. But high and over all of these earthly thrones, is a throne that never trembles. If you can see God on his throne, then that throne is commissioning you.

To take the crucified Christ to cure all of the ills of this nation. That is our message. We must have a vision. Of the enthronement of his holiness - his ultimate glory in the earth. We need to see a vision of ourselves. If I may have a vision of his glory, I need the true vision of self. We need also the cleansing that he provides. We are not fit for all of this - but to say, there is to dishonor God. Remember, the altar is there. And the fire is there. God help us to get to the altar. He will cleanse us and purge us and make us what he wants us to be. If we will let him.

By the matchless mercy of the altar, and the fire, who today will say - here am I. Life is never rightly spent until seen as a divine errand for God. We will never be all we ought to be. When a greater than Moses legislates, and a wiser than Solomon speaks. We would do very well to listen to what he has to say.

Resort hotel porch a woman roared all day at her funds
climbed a man by Mt.

she said, "il followed them all the way!"

(Observed them progress -

Was NOT following them - Jesus meant some
daily service not talk!

God's Method - we don't want a sermon - Back the house with
a celebrity or drawing card, Bible does not say
"How shall they hear without a trumpet?" etc say.
How shall they hear without a preacher? Rom 10:14.