

Read: Isaiah 6.9-13.

“Probably Isaiah, responding as he did in verse 8, thought that his serving the Lord would result in the nation’s cleansing. However, the Lord told him his message would not result in much spiritual response. The people had not listened before and they would not listen now. The Lord did not delight in judging His people, but discipline was necessary because of their disobedience. In fact the people, on hearing Isaiah’s message, would become even more hardened against the Lord” (John A. Martin).

We hear Jesus quoting these words in Matthew 13.14-15. He was talking about the parables. Jesus’ purpose, however, wasn’t to obscure the truth and harden people’s hearts. Rather he knew that they weren’t ready to believe in the message. The stories were the message sown in a memorable fashion with the confidence that for some there would be future positive response.

The chapter ends with a promised hope. “ But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land” (Is. 6.19). Isaiah returns to this theme in 11.1 – “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse...”

Reflect:

- Think back over the story of “Someone Else”. What call of the Lord is going out today? In what ways is the Lord calling me? How am I responding to his call?

Study 3: The Root of Jesse. Reading: Isaiah 11



Studies from the book of Isaiah

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2. Send Me!

Reading: Isaiah 6

Every church has experienced the death of a key member – with gifts and involvement in so many areas. How can they ever be replaced? But is it ever like this?

“I know that all of you were saddened to learn this week of the death of one of our church’s most valuable members – Someone Else. Someone’s passing created a vacancy that will be difficult to fill. Else has been with us for many years, and for every one of those years, Someone did far more than the normal person’s share of the work.

“Whenever leadership was mentioned, this wonderful person was looked to for inspiration as well as results. ‘Someone Else can work with that group’. Whenever there was a job to do, a class to teach, or a meeting to attend, one name was on everyone’s lips, ‘Let Someone Else do it’.

“It was common knowledge that Someone Else was among the largest givers in the church. Whenever there was a financial need, everyone just assumed that Someone Else would make up the difference.

“Someone Else was a wonderful person, sometimes appearing super-human, but a person can only do so much. Were the truth known, everyone expected too much of Someone Else.

“Now Someone Else is gone. We wonder what we are going to do. Someone Else left a wonderful example to follow, but who is going to follow it? Who is going to do the things Someone Else did? Remember, we can’t depend on Someone Else anymore.”

Pause for a Moment:

- The passing of “Someone Else”... Is this story just a clever piece of writing – or does it reflect a reality our congregation has experienced? What do you think? Is this just a “church” problem, or do we see it in the wider community too?

Awesome Vision

Read: Isaiah 6.1-8.

Some questions have been raised about when and where Isaiah's vision and commission took place. His prophetic ministry was "during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1.1). Yet his commission (in chapter 6) took place "in the year that King Uzziah died" (6.1). Had he begun his ministry (chapters 1 to 5) before this vision? or is the vision placed here to show that the prophet knows that he also is a sinner? The vision seems to be set in the Holiest Place in the temple. Was Isaiah of priestly descent like Jeremiah (Jer. 1.1) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 1.3)? or was he not physically in the temple but there in the vision?

In his vision Isaiah saw the grandeur and holiness of the Lord. He was enthroned, "high and exalted and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs..." This is the only reference to "seraphs" in the Bible (*seraphim* is the plural form in Hebrew). The name comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to burn" – all part of this awesome vision of the Lord. In their worship they were calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (v. 3).

"Almighty" (*Tsabaoth* in Heb.) often rendered "of hosts" – the "armies" of Israel. The Lord, the ultimate ruler of their nation is absolutely holy. His glory fills, not just the Holiest Place in the temple, but "the whole earth". We tend to think of God as remote, living in a distant heaven. The revelation to Isaiah was that the Lord may be hidden, but he is right here among us.

Reflect:

- What experiences have we had in which we have been deeply aware of the awesome holiness of the Lord? How has that led us to worship? How has it affected the rest of our lives?

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (v. 5).

"The Lord of hosts"? Already Isaiah has described the sinful nation as "a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to

corruption" (1.4) – and their Lord is absolute holiness! But in his vision Isaiah is deeply conscious of his own sin – and his peril for being in close contact with the Lord. We may well have thought he was far better than the next person. That kind of comparison is irrelevant – in the presence of the Lord's holiness all of us will know ourselves to be sinners.

"Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'" (vv. 6-7)

The knowledge of personal sin opens up the possibility of divine forgiveness. We saw this in chapter 1 in the Lord's promise that, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (1.18). Only Jesus himself, in bearing the message of the Kingdom, has been without sin. All other messengers of the gospel are sinners saved by grace.

Reflect:

- "Only Jesus himself, in bearing the message of the Kingdom, has been without sin. All other messengers of the gospel are sinners saved by grace." How important do you think it is for Christian ministers and people to be deeply aware of their own constant need for the gospel of grace?
- To what extent do people outside the church think we consider ourselves to be "goody-goodies" and are judgmental of everybody else in the community? Is their view of us true? What can we do about it?

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' " (v. 8).

Isaiah wasn't willing to "go" because he was good enough on his own merits, but because the God of grace was calling him. The word "us" in reference to God isn't what is called a "royal plural". This is one of many hints in the Old Testament (as in Gen. 1.26; 11.7) at the three-in-one God who is fully revealed to us in the New Testament. Isaiah, now cleansed, was ready to respond to the call to service.