

HEED GOD'S WORD

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne—high and exalted, and the train [of his robe] filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphs, each one having six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two wings they covered their feet, and with two wings they flew. ³They were calling out to one another, “Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.” ⁴At the sound of their voices the foundations of the thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵Then I declared, “Woe to me! I am ruined!—for I am a man with unclean lips and I live among a people with unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts.” ⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷He touched my mouth with it and said, “See, this has touched your lips—your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.” ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord inquiring, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I, send me.”

⁹He said, “Go and tell this people, ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ ¹⁰Cause the heart of this people to become callous. Cause their ears to become closed, and shut their eyes; so that they may not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return to me and be healed.” ¹¹Then I asked, “Lord, how long [must I do this]?” He answered, “Until their cities lie in ruins without any inhabitants; [until] their houses are left deserted and their land is utterly desolate—¹²[until] Jehovah has removed the people to a distant country and the abandoned places are numerous throughout the land. ¹³And if there be a tenth [of the population] left in the land, it also will be consumed. But just as the terebinth and the oak leave stumps when they are chopped down, so the holy seed will be ‘the stump’ in the land.” (Isa. 6:1-13)

Introduction

If you grew up in the city, accustomed to the noises of squealing tires and police sirens all through the night, you would have a hard time getting to sleep in the country. The stillness of a summer night punctuated only by the sound of the crickets would tend to keep you awake—but eventually you would get accustomed to it and have no trouble falling asleep. Conversely, when you first move to the city from the quiet of the country, you will be kept awake all night by the sound of the sirens—but after repeated exposure to those wailing sirens, you would come to ignore them and be able to sleep right through them.

It is beneficial to your physical health and well-being to be able to ignore the sounds of the night and sleep right through them in undisturbed tranquility. But it will prove to be disastrous to your spiritual well-being if you take the same approach to the Word of God; ignoring it and failing to heed it. Such was the case with Old Testament Israel.

We must be aware of the danger in being exposed to the Word of God—especially on a continuous basis—but not responding to that Word in faith and obedience. Let us be diligent to heed God’s Word, because the failure to do so will result in dangerous spiritual consequences.

I. Heed God’s Word,

...Because You are Dealing with the LORD of Hosts (Isa. 6:1-5)

In verse 1 Isaiah writes, *“I saw the Lord.”* Isaiah had a personal encounter with the living God. He finds himself lifted out of the ordinary affairs of everyday life and suddenly standing in the presence of God. He here uses the name *“Adonai,”* the One who rules over all, the One who is the absolute Lord and Master.

Do we have a true appreciation of who God is? Do we wrongly view Him as being impotent or irrelevant; thinking, “I’ve got such great problems that not even God can solve them!”? Or do we appreciate the fact that He is the Almighty and Sovereign Lord over all? That He is the God who created us, the God who constantly sustains our life, and the God before whom we will one day give an account?

Isaiah describes this revelation of God in the following terms. The LORD was seen *“seated on a throne.”* He reveals Himself to be the true Ruler over the world, the sovereign Lord of creation and history. Do we suffer from spiritual nearsightedness, not able to see beyond the human rulers of the nation; or accepting the false pagan assumption that fate or chance controls history and the lives of men? Or do we have a true spiritual perception; recognizing that the LORD governs nations and He directs history for the accomplishment of His own purpose and the fulfillment of His own eternal plan? Note, for example, the description of the LORD given by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:11. In that passage the LORD is described as the God *who “causes all things to work for the sake of his own plan.”* That is to say, He causes all things to operate and interact in such a way that they will contribute to the fulfillment of His own sovereign will and plan.

Isaiah further testifies that the LORD is seen to be *“high and exalted.”* His divine majesty and sovereignty are not to be compared to the temporal and temporary sovereignty of earthly rulers; the LORD is transcendent above all. Do we appreciate the fact that God is not just a “superhuman?” On the contrary, He is in a category all by Himself; He is God, and as such He is to be worshiped, revered, trusted, and obeyed.

As the LORD is seated upon His throne, He is attended by angelic beings called *“seraphs”* (literally, “burning ones.”) Their very being as “burning ones” illustrates the infinite purity and glory of the LORD. Note their position, they are seen standing above the LORD, forming a halo of living glory and being ever ready to do His bidding. Note, secondly, their description, each one had six wings. With

two wings each covered his face, to shield himself from the awesome brilliance of the glory of God. With two wings each covered his feet, an act of humility and reverence in the presence of God, note Exodus 3:5, where Moses, when standing in the presence of the LORD, is instructed, *"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."* With two wings each of them flew, carrying out the LORD's bidding as His faithful servants. Thirdly, note the seraphim's occupation, they are continually praising God. They are continually proclaiming His holiness. His holiness is absolute and infinite, hence the three-fold cry of *"Holy, holy, holy."* It was His holiness that was the attribute most neglected and abused by the nation, in Isaiah 5:19 woe was pronounced upon those who taunted the prophet of the LORD and the LORD Himself, urging Him to perform the righteous judgment that He had threatened to enact against the sinning nation: *"Woe to those who say, 'Let [God] hurry, let him be quick to do his work, so that we may see it! Let that which the Holy One has determined to do come and occur, so that we may experience it!'"*

Furthermore, the seraphim are found continually proclaiming the LORD's dominion over the earth: *"the whole earth is full of his glory"* (or, *"the fullness of the whole earth is His glory."*) He is the sovereign Lord over all the earth, as the Psalmist declares, *"The earth is Jehovah's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it; ²because he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters"* (Psl. 24:1-2.) It is the LORD's and His glory to reign over all the earth. It is also His right to receive glory from all the earth:

Sing to Jehovah a new song; sing to Jehovah, all the earth ... ³Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples; ⁴for great is Jehovah and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods ... ⁷Ascribe to Jehovah, O families of nations, ascribe to Jehovah glory and strength. ⁸Ascribe to Jehovah the glory due his name ... ⁹Worship Jehovah in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. ¹⁰Say among the nations, "Jehovah reigns." (Psl. 96:1,3-4,7-8a,9,10a)

Verse 4 appears to indicate that the seraphs are serving as heralds, proclaiming the coming of the LORD to His temple, to the nation, and to the earth. Note that the house was filled with smoke, just as when the LORD came down and His presence filled the Old Testament temple in the days of Solomon: *"When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of Jehovah; ¹¹so that the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of Jehovah filled his temple."* (1 Kgs. 8:10-11)

Whenever we are exposed to the Word of God, let us be careful to heed that holy Word—responding to it with faith and obedience, because we are dealing with none other than the LORD of hosts Himself.

II. Heed God's Word,

...Because You are Dealing with the Word of His Grace (Isa. 6:6-7)

Upon seeing the LORD of glory, Isaiah cries out, "*Woe to me!*" (He fears himself to be doomed.) "*I am ruined!*" Literally, he is declaring himself to be destroyed.

Do we appreciate what it is really like to have a close encounter with God? Note, for example, the experience of Daniel:

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, ⁵I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. ⁶His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. ⁷I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. ⁸So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. (Dan. 10:4-8;) such was Daniel's experience when he saw Christ in His glory

Isaiah goes on to explain the reasons for his terror. He begins by confessing, "*I am a man with unclean lips.*" The scene of the angelic beings ceaselessly praising God and testifying to God's holiness, convicts Isaiah of what should be true of him, but what was, in fact, not the characteristic of his speech and life. What comes out of our mouth? Words of praise addressed to God, and words of truth, purity, and grace addressed to men? Or must we confess that the words of James 3:9-10 are true of us? "*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.*" Isaiah goes on to testify, "*I live among a people with unclean lips.*" Isaiah becomes acutely aware of the damnable contrast between the holy choir of angels on the one hand, and himself and the sinful nation on the other.

Isaiah fears for his life, because, as he declares, "*my eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts.*" What mortal, sinful man can see God and live? Note the reaction of Samson's father when he and his wife saw the LORD, "*We are doomed to die!*" he said to his wife. "*We have seen God!*" (Judg. 13:22.) What mortal, sinful man can stand in the presence of God? The prophet Malachi asks, "*Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? for he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap*" (Mal. 3:2.)

But this honest confession of sin on the part of Isaiah is met with the ministry of God's mercy. "*Then* (following Isaiah's confession) *one of the seraphs flew unto me.*" When there has been a sincere confession of sin before the LORD, then, by means of this angelic being, the LORD draws near to this man who could not draw near to the LORD.

When we pray, do we take the posture of the Pharisee, *The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers,*

evildoers, adulterers—or even like this publican. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tithe of all that I get.” (Lk. 18:11-12) Or that of the publican, *“But the publican stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”* (Lk. 18:13) Take careful note of our Lord’s commentary on these respective prayers: *“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God”* (Lk. 18:14.)

Isaiah goes on to relate that the seraph came to him *“with a live coal in his hand that he had taken with tongs from the altar.”* The live coal represents the burning, sin-consuming holiness of God, here being applied in mercy to purify the repentant sinner and not consume him. For the New Testament fulfillment of this Old Testament interaction between the LORD and Isaiah, consider 1 John 1:8-9, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Whenever we are exposed to the Word of God, let us be careful to heed that holy Word—responding to it with faith and obedience, because we are dealing with the Word of God’s grace. As the Apostle Peter states it, *“the word of the Lord ... this is the word of good news that was preached to you”* (1 Pet. 1:25.)

III. Heed God’s Word, ...Because to Ignore It is Spiritually Fatal (Isa. 6:8-13)

In verse 9, Isaiah is given the following commission by the LORD: *“He said, ‘Go and tell this people, Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’”* The people are instructed to continue to hear the Word of God, but without understanding; they are instructed to see the work of God, but without perception.

Consider the commission the LORD here gives to Isaiah (vs. 10,) and its bearing upon our own souls:

Cause the heart of this people to become callous. Cause their ears to become closed, and shut their eyes; so that they may not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return to me and be healed. (Isa. 6:10)

Isaiah’s continual preaching of the Word of God, following upon all the preaching done by all the previous prophets, would have the effect of making the people insensitive and unresponsive by virtue of the repetition of the message, especially in light of their present habit of unresponsiveness. Isaiah’s ministry was a ministry of judgment, a ministry designed to produce hardening in the lives of a people who had refused to respond. Ironically, the very message that was originally intended for salvation would now become to them an instrument of judgment: How else could they be saved except by the preaching of God’s

Word, declaring their sin and directing them to the LORD as their Savior? Yet, the continued exposure to that Word—without the response of faith and obedience—would result in the people becoming callous to that life-giving Word.

What is presented here is a very mysterious and sobering phenomenon. It is a form of judgment enacted by God against those who have the privilege of hearing His Word, but who passively ignore or actively resist that sacred Word—and do so consistently and constantly. May we not let this happen to us. Let us not cause the Word of God, which is intended to give us spiritual life, become the means of giving us spiritual paralysis of the heart that will lead to spiritual death and finally to damnation, all because of a willful and continual disregard of that life-giving Word.

Whenever we are exposed to the Word of God, let us be careful to heed that holy Word—responding to it with faith and obedience, because to ignore it is spiritually fatal. *"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts"* (Heb. 3:15.)