

## **God Has A Plan** - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Isaiah 6:1-13** (#481)

**Introduction:** If the people who keep track of trends and statistics are correct, the prophetic parts of the Bible are the ones that you and I are least likely to study. Sure, we like some passages in the prophets – the early chapters of Daniel, for example, or the book of Jonah – but the larger books aren't places we often turn to aside from the odd quote out of Isaiah around Christmastime. Why is this? While there are no doubt many reasons, the two that really stand out in my personal experience are, first, that they seem so otherworldly and hard to understand; and second, it isn't always obvious how these prophets writing in Old Testament times apply to you and I on this side of the cross.

My goal with this short series in Isaiah is to give us a little snapshot of a much larger book. An appetizer, if you will. These books are inspired by the same God who wrote our favorite other books of the Bible. These words speak to the same Lord with the same character and priorities. Only the perspective has changed. And, in our days of divided loyalties and practical compromises, we desperately need the perspective – and the banquet of truth – that Isaiah lays before us.

The book of Isaiah itself is a long one – 66 chapters! And it covers a wide swath of history. His name gives a clue to what we will see of the Lord throughout our time in this book: “Yahweh is salvation.” Keep that in mind, particularly when we read the frightening scenes of judgment. We learn in **chapter 1** that this book is a prophetic vision given to Isaiah regarding the divided kingdoms of Judah and Jerusalem. Specifically, the first audience of this book would be Isaiah's contemporaries – his fellow citizens at the time of his writing. Yet the events, because they are prophetic, end up pointing forward in time. Chronologically, a lot of the events here aren't ones we have specific dates for, but we do believe that King Uzziah died around 740 BC. Later in the book, Sennacherib's death is referenced, which we have good evidence for dating around 681 BC. As I was researching the book overall, I was helped greatly by the ESV Study Bible's introduction, which had this to say about the overall theme: “The whole book portrays God's plan for Judah as a story that is headed somewhere, namely,

toward the coming of the final heir of David who will bring light to the Gentiles.” That is to say: this book points forward to the Messiah overall, and to how the story of God’s people fits in with the Messiah who was to come and who will – from our vantage point – someday be returning.

We are starting in the midst of the story, so a couple comments about what came in **chapters 1-5** might be helpful: **chapters 1-2** are, in some ways, a summary of the rest of the book. God’s people have rebelled against Him. They have turned their back on Him and acted in ways that were directly against what God had commanded. Much of their religion was empty – a sort of “national pride” of going through the motions rather than devoting themselves to the Lord.

As the chapters go on, Isaiah records that many will receive the judgment they deserve. Others, a remnant, will repent. That’s important to see: God’s plans for His people will still hold even when so many of them have turned away from Him.

Remember the big picture of the Old Testament: back in **Genesis 12**, God had promised Abraham that his people – who would end up being Israel – would be a nation, would be protected, and would bless all the families of the earth. God has always intended to call all people on the earth to worship Him and enjoy His grace. And the way that He has planned for that is to use Israel as a shining beacon of His mercy. Yet, Isaiah’s message is that Israel has specifically *not* done this. Instead of representing the Lord well, they have represented Him poorly – even wickedly – to the nations all around.

In our slice of Isaiah – **chapters 6-12** – we will read of the solution: God will purify His people and give them renewed hope. Let’s get to seeing that ourselves...

**6:1-5** These first five verses all center around a display of God’s holiness and Isaiah’s sinfulness. Note, first, what Isaiah sees: the Lord sitting on His throne. A robe so big and plush that it fills the temple. Angelic seraphim flying around. This, truly, is a picture of holiness and power and might. It, alone, might be enough to humble a person, but what Isaiah sees quickly becomes what Isaiah hears...

He hears a description of the scene before him: God is holy. So holy, in fact, that his sinless perfection only captures part of who he is. Yet, not only does Isaiah hear a description, he also hears something else – a great shaking, greater in character than any earthquake that could be imagined. The very foundation of the temple is shaken – and this temple is of no flimsy construction! Smoke fills the house. These are scenes that should remind us of what happened on Mount Sinai back in **Exodus 19**: acts of God’s great power, authority, and might.

Yet, Isaiah’s response is perhaps radically different than our own would be. Whereas we are often hard to impress and have been trained by advertising and marketing to think that nothing is really as great as it seems, Isaiah responds with fear. Isaiah sees the Lord, and his response is not casual and low-key, as if God is all buddy-buddy, somebody to kid around with. Rather, Isaiah’s response is outright fear. Why? Because he recognizes how God’s holiness is completely different than Isaiah’s own sinfulness. He speaks – and therefore acts – in ways that are anything but holy. What’s more, he can’t escape sin – because it’s not just his own, but also everybody around him. And now he has seen in a vision where he is confronted by the King of the Universe.

Before we move on, I want to challenge each of us: do you see God’s holiness like this? When the Bible speaks of the “fear of the Lord,” is that something you take seriously? Or do you try to explain it away? Frankly, you don’t need a seminary degree to understand what fear is. Nor do you need to be some well-educated theologian to grasp the difference between the vision of God’s holiness here and the reality of Isaiah’s – and our own – sinfulness. Let there be no mistake: God is *for* His people, it’s true. But be careful that you don’t turn God into somebody just like you and I but with some neat powers. He is holy. We are not. He is the judge; apart from Christ’s work on the cross, we are the condemned. Only by grasping God’s holiness and our own sinfulness will we truly be able to appreciate what comes next – and what Christ does for us down the line...

**6:6-7** As much as Isaiah’s response is the right response, I want you to see God’s grace in these verses: whereas He would have every right to utterly annihilate

Isaiah because of his sinfulness, something else entirely happens. One of the seraphim flies over to Isaiah with a burning coal. He touches it to Isaiah's lips and says that his guilt has been taken away and his sin atoned for. Why is this important? Because if the first picture is of the holy God and the unworthy Isaiah, this next one is of the gracious God who has made Isaiah holy, symbolized – as one scholar writes – with a coal “that comes from the place of sacrifice, the place where a substitute was offered for the people's sins. The antidote for Isaiah's danger and defilement comes from the God-provided place of atonement.”

I wonder: do you believe in a God like that? It is easy in our society to dislike a God as holy as ours is. Folks think that He is remote, or judgmental, or uncaring. But the reality is that we need a God who is holy like this: if God were just like you and I in every respect, then He wouldn't be God at all. Truth is, we need somebody who is perfectly holy and just. We need a God who is righteous in every respect. And we need that God to be selfless, to do the unthinkable of forgiving us and having a relationship with us. This is what God does for Isaiah. It's also what He will do for you, if you will trust Him. The message of the Scriptures is not – as so many try to make it – all about us. Nor is it all about how Jesus died for us and so now we can just get on with our lives, as if sin were no big deal. Rather, the message of the cross is that sin is a huge deal – so huge that only God could correct it. And that's exactly what He has done for all who trust in the Savior. Do you? How are you responding to that kind of love?

God's holiness, Isaiah's sinfulness, God's graciousness. Let's end with one more picture in this chapter: Isaiah's usefulness...

**6:8-13** God has a mission for Isaiah. Does it surprise you that God would use a sinner made clean to do His work? In our country, it is pretty difficult to even get a job if you have a criminal conviction, much less to ever be trusted again. Yet even though our nation doesn't grasp forgiveness, God does: He gives the rebel another chance – and a crucial one. God plans to use Isaiah for one of the most important tasks in the world.

The Lord asks a rhetorical question from His throne: who can be sent? At this point, the mission isn't even outlined, so this is a real step of faith by Isaiah: he volunteers even before he knows the details. By the way, shouldn't that be how you and I respond to the Lord? Rather than saying mentally or spiritually, "well God, I might be interested... what all would it entail to be a disciple?" Shouldn't we be chomping at the bit? "Wow Lord, you've made me clean... I'll do whatever you ask – just point me in the right direction!" I love Isaiah's passion! What a good challenge for you and I and everyone whom Christ has made new!

After Isaiah has accepted the mission, God explains it. What will his task look like? Interestingly, it looks like proclaiming judgment! And his listeners aren't going to be too thrilled with him.

Yet, particularly with **verses 9-10**, Isaiah is being handed one of the most important missions that there is. If these verses sound familiar, it is because they show up often in the New Testament. Portions of these are repeated in each of the four Gospels, as well as in Acts and Romans. Isaiah will proclaim God's judgment – that there truly is a standard of right and wrong and that – unlike how so many in our world want to see things – wrong actually will be punished. Those who have gone against the Lord will get precisely what they deserve. Those who turn to the Lord will see and hear and understand and be healed. The Good News that the Lord offers is available to all people. Yet, the sad fact is that no clever arguments will convince everyone to respond. That is how bad sin is. It is how deep the disease has gone.

It's understandable, isn't it, that Isaiah's question would be "how long, O Lord?" How long is he to keep at this mission? The Lord's answer: until judgment has come. Cities will lie in ruins. Houses will be empty. The people will go into exile. Said another way: Isaiah is to preach this message until there is nobody left to preach it to because the people have been conquered and sent into exile.

Yet, I want you to notice something before we end: the burned over cities and lands aren't the final scene in this picture. Instead, the final scene is that there is a

stump still standing. A stump made up of a holy seed. It's a picture, a metaphor to be sure, but it's also hope – God will judge, yes, but in that very judgment is the hope for people who are going into exile.

With that, let's end on two challenges. Do you believe – whatever your past, whatever your sins, whatever your failures – that God's grace is so good and so transforming that He can and will use even you? That He has important and significant things for you to do not because of how great you are, but because of how gracious He is?

And second: do you see that judgment – while severe and tragic – is a good thing? That judgment is part of what God uses to right the wrongs of sin, and to cause those who would listen to sit up and pay attention? That judgment is part of His plan to rescue His people? In fact, that judgment needs to be seen for what it is if we are to grasp how heavy and meaningful Christ's sacrifice on the cross is?

The big challenge of this book will be to start to see all of life – big things and small – through the lens of God's holiness. We are being called to adopt His view of what matters and what doesn't, what is holy and what is wicked. Are you willing to be changed? Will you be transformed? Let's pray that He would do the work in each of us...