

2. Crisis of Leadership (1Q 2021—Isaiah)

Biblical Material: Isa. 6:1–4, Isa. 6:5–7, Isa. 6:8, Isa. 6:9–13.

Quotes

- Any person who is oppressed and heavy laden may be tempted to manipulate his situation to find an expedient political or practical solution. However, trusting in the Lord and waiting on Him in obedience brings lasting peace and comfort. Because they will not listen and refuse to hear God, they will wallow in confusion. The lies and double-speak of politicians and self-seeking leaders echo across the centuries. *Charles Kosanke*
- The most serious failure of leadership is the failure to foresee. *Robert K. Greenleaf*
- It's fine to celebrate success but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure. *Bill Gates*
- The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure - which is: Try to please everybody. *Herbert Bayard Swope*
- Our world is very dishonest, and our leaders encourage dishonesty by setting bad examples - by lying, being corrupt, and using political sleight of hand to sustain power. *Stuart Wilde*

Questions

Is this study about human leadership? Or is this lesson an example of what happens when we refuse to relate to God? How do we show our trust in God? Does God really want us to be ignorant of him so he doesn't have to heal us? Why does God speak this way, threatening destruction before he will finally act to save? How does this relate to the character of God?

Bible summary

Isaiah has a vision of God on his throne (Isa. 6:1–4). Isaiah's reaction is that he is a sinful being in the presence of this holy God, but his sin and guilt is taken away (Isa. 6:5-7). The Lord asks for volunteers and Isaiah responds (Isa. 6:8). God's message is "Go and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but never understanding. Keep on seeing, but never comprehending.' Make the minds of this people insensitive; make their ears deaf and shut their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their minds, and repent and be healed." (Isa. 6:9, 10 FBV)

Comment

It's all a question of trust—confidence based on evidence... Do you trust the leadership; does the leadership trust God? In his vision, Isaiah is overwhelmed by the glory and holiness of God. Inevitably he believes he is doomed since he has "seen" God. While it may have reassured him of the all-powerful nature of God, his immediate response is terror. So God gives Isaiah a message—a message he is to take to his people.

What is the essence of God's message? That they hear but don't understand, see but don't perceive—and in the sense that this is deliberate. It's not that the people would like to understand. They prefer ignorance of God, and don't want his explanations. So in an effort to

shock, God tells Isaiah that the people should have calloused hearts, dull ears, and closed eyes, for otherwise they might even respond and turn and be healed. As if God doesn't want to do that!

Puzzled, shocked, disturbed, Isaiah asks, "How long?" Until everything is destroyed, God replies. In other words, until the physical situation becomes so desperate that people realize there is no hope other than God and finally come back to him.

The tragedy of Isaiah's Israel is that though they think they know God, he is just a "God in the box" in the Temple. He is to be placated with offerings and dealt with mechanically. When God asks for a real relationship with his people, they refuse, because they prefer the system. They truly don't want to know God, and prefer to be left in "blissful ignorance."

Why don't they want God, except as some ally to be used and manipulated? Because they prefer to trust in themselves, in their own power, in their human leaders. Like so many through the centuries, religion is just some kind of act, something that has to be done as part of life, but it has no real meaning or personal relevance. The problem with such an attitude is that it's so hard for God to get through—they see all religious activities as some requirement and devoid of real meaning. So God has to risk seeming vindictive and hostile just to get their attention.

But ultimately the promise is of a seed, a stump, that is left—the possibility of rebirth and renewal as those who wish return to God, the only one who can heal them.

His appeal is based on reason and conversation (Isaiah 1:18; 43:26), wanting people to think about it so they can believe and understand." (Isaiah 43:10). Job also wanted to reason with God, (Job 13:3). In Proverbs 14:15 FBV is the commendation for thinking, "Stupid people believe whatever they're told, but sensible people think about what they're doing." Jesus himself pointed to the use of the mind as essential in commitment to God: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37 NIV).

The use of the mind is clearly encouraged by early Christians. Paul writes: "What should I do? I will pray 'in the Spirit,' but I will pray with my mind too. I will sing 'in the Spirit,' but I will sing with my mind too," (1 Corinthians 14:15 FBV), while Peter advises, "Make sure your minds are in gear." (1 Peter 1:13 FBV).

Ellen White comments

In Isaiah's day the spiritual understanding of mankind was dark through misapprehension of God. Long had Satan sought to lead men to look upon their Creator as the author of sin and suffering and death. Those whom he had thus deceived, imagined that God was hard and exacting. They regarded Him as watching to denounce and condemn, unwilling to receive the sinner so long as there was a legal excuse for not helping him. The law of love by which heaven is ruled had been misrepresented by the archdeceiver as a restriction upon men's happiness, a burdensome yoke from which they should be glad to escape. He declared that its precepts could not be obeyed and that the penalties of transgression were bestowed arbitrarily.

In losing sight of the true character of Jehovah, the Israelites were without excuse. Often had God revealed Himself to them as one "full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." Psalm 86:15. "When Israel was a child," He testified, "then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt." Hosea 11:1.

Tenderly had the Lord dealt with Israel in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage and in their journey to the Promised Land. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. Isaiah 63:9. {PK 311-2}