

Isaiah 6 & Isaiah 55

Isaiah 6:9 He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.’¹⁰ Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.”

Isaiah 55:10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

How can we reconcile these two apparently contradictory passages? In Isaiah 6, God indicates that none of Isaiah’s contemporary hearers would heed his preaching. But in Isaiah 55, God promises that His Word through Isaiah would produce a rich harvest.

The key to resolving this apparent contradiction is to understand that the first passage refers to the *short-term* impact of Isaiah’s preaching (i.e., in his lifetime), while the second passage refers to the *long-term* impact of Isaiah’s preaching (i.e., in succeeding generations).

After seeing a vision of God’s glory (Isaiah 6:1-7), Isaiah responded to God’s question: “Who will go (speak) for us?” by volunteering: “Here am I. Send me!” God then warned Isaiah (as we saw above) not to expect a positive response from those who heard his preaching. They had already hardened their hearts against God’s Word, and more preaching of His Word would not soften their hearts. When Isaiah (doubtlessly taken aback by God’s warning) asked: “How long (must I expect this response)?” God’s answered: “Until the people have been



exiled and the land is desolate” (Isa. 6:11,12). Since this exile was not completed until after Isaiah died, his mission was to continue preaching God’s Word for the rest of his life without expecting anyone to respond. By any reckoning, this would be a very tough assignment!

Later in Isaiah’s ministry, though, God gave him a promise that richly compensated for decades of apparently fruitless ministry (see Isaiah 55:10,11 above). Because Isaiah was proclaiming *God’s* Word, he could be sure that it would eventually bear a rich harvest. This is because God’s Word is like a seed, carrying within itself the power to ultimately accomplish God’s redemptive purpose. As God said to another Old Testament prophet (Jeremiah) whose preaching ministry was also apparently fruitless: “I am watching over My Word to perform it” (Jeremiah 1:12). When we faithfully proclaim His Word, God ensures that it will ultimately find its way to people who are willing to respond to it.

How amazingly true God was to His promise to Isaiah! How many people over the last 2800 years have come to faith in the Messiah by reading passages like Isaiah 7,9,53? How many believers have had their faith mightily strengthened by reading the book of Isaiah? Whatever we guess in answer to this question is likely to fall far short of the reality. Today, Isaiah is so glad that he responded to God’s call to proclaim His Word. Today, the decades of apparent fruitlessness are replaced by awe as he witnesses daily the increasing harvest of his preaching ministry!

Over seven hundred years later, the Messiah whom Isaiah predicted would experience a similar phenomenon. Although Jesus’ teaching ministry appeared at first to be wildly popular, within three years the crowds had vanished – and His followers had dwindled to a handful by the night of His arrest. Apparently, His teaching had had no lasting effect. Yet shortly after His resurrection and ascension, these same few followers, empowered by His Spirit, proclaimed His message and saw thousands of people humbly receive it. This same pattern has repeated



itself countless times all over the world over the past two thousand years.

We are not divinely-inspired prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, or divinely-inspired apostles like Paul and Peter. But we do have access to God's Word through the Bible. And this Word still possesses the same living power to produce a harvest – sometimes sooner, usually later. So sow it generously! Share it as often as you have opportunity with those who don't know Christ (Colossians 4:5,6). Teach it to your children and grandchildren as you live your daily lives with them (Deuteronomy 6:7). Use it to encourage and counsel your brothers and sisters in Christ (Colossians 1:28; 3:16). Do your part to sow God's Word, and trust God to do His part to bear a harvest in His own time. Consider Alec Motyer's application of this promise:

“(When) we tried to share the Word of God and saw nothing for it . . . the Word we shared was not ours but His. No one loves the Word of God more than the God whose Word it is, and He, the eternal, almighty, impeccably faithful Lord, has pledged that His Word will never be fruitless, never come back empty-handed.”¹

Lord Jesus, thank You for the priceless privilege of being entrusted to share Your Word with others. Help us not to compare ourselves with others who may be more gifted in evangelism or preaching or teaching. Help us to be faithful to communicate Your Word the best we can to the people You have placed in our lives. Thank You that Your Word is effectual – possessing within itself the power to germinate in human hearts. We thank You and praise You in advance for the eventual harvest that You have promised. And we look forward to the day when we will be with You, when we will see fully and rejoice in Your harvest!

¹ Alec Motyer, *Isaiah by the Day* (Christian Focus Publications, 2011), p. 269.



