

“How to be a Successful Disciple”

Isaiah 6: 1-8

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Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Milton, Winston Churchill, Jimmy Carter, Mohatma Ghandi, Mother Teresa. In my opinion, Isaiah was a composite of all these talented and gifted people. He was brilliant, insightful, persuasive, courageous, compassionate and articulate. To say the least, he was a successful servant of the Lord, one of His most effective.

Isaiah was born in Jerusalem around 760 B.C. Many scholars regard him to be the first and greatest of the Major Prophets. Others say he was the greatest man of his time. “He moved like a prince among men,” they said.

His ministry spanned forty years and four kings of Judah. He taught his people about God, man and life using words and analogies that the common man could understand and remember. His style was simple and direct, yet profound and powerful.

He is still quoted and studied today, almost three thousand years since he lived. We look to Isaiah to help us better understand who God is and what He expects of us. Certainly, Isaiah was a successful and effective servant of the Lord. What was his secret?

I am sure there were many things that made Isaiah successful, but his call to be a prophet recorded in Isaiah 6:1-8 revealed three. He had a healthy image of God, an accurate picture of who he was and an appreciation of what God had done for him.

These are three ingredients needed in your life and mine if we are going to be successful servants, also. Let’s examine them this morning.

To be an effective servant of the Lord, you need to have a healthy image of God.

You must believe that the God you are going to serve is good for you and others. I am convinced the more you get to know God the more you will like Him and want to serve Him. I am confident this was the foundation of Isaiah’s zeal.

What was Isaiah’s image of God? Based upon this scripture, he saw God as eternal, good, majestic and personal.

When Israel’s beloved King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw two things, an empty earthly throne and an occupied heavenly throne. “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” Isaiah 6:1. Judah’s throne was vacant, but not God’s. Uzziah was dead, but God was alive, strong and ready to help His leaderless people whose hearts were struck with fear and anxiety.

How comforting and reassuring it must have been to Isaiah to know that God was **eternal**. People come and go, including trusted leaders, but God is always with His people.

Isaiah saw God as **good**. “And they were calling to one another, holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory” Isaiah 6: 3. Isaiah was the first theologian to connect the holiness of God to the goodness of God. “Holiness” was a reference to the uniqueness of God, His transcendence. Isaiah explained holiness in terms of moral purity and saw God as just and righteous. Isaiah knew God to be reliable, dependable and trustworthy.

Isaiah saw God as **majestic and magnificent**. Not only was Israel filled with the glory of God, but all the earth. There was no place on earth that God was not, so why would a person need an idol or another god?

At the same time, Isaiah felt that God was **personal**. Isaiah said the temple was filled with the presence of God and he was singled out to answer a most penetrating question, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” Isaiah 6:8.

Becoming a successful servant of the Lord begins with a healthy image of God. When you realize who God is, you want to become a part of His family and team.

Secondly, to be an effective servant you must have an accurate picture of who you are. When Isaiah realized he was in the presence of God, what was his immediate reaction? “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” Isaiah 6:5.

I cannot begin to tell you how startling those words are. For you see, Isaiah was a part of the aristocracy of Jerusalem. He was a man of privilege and honor. For him to confess a sense of unworthiness was unheard of. As a matter of fact, prior to Isaiah, when a person encountered the Lord, he or she became aware of their mortality and finiteness. Isaiah was the first, however, to acknowledge that he was not only a man, but a sinful man living among sinful people.

A successful servant of God must possess humility. There is no place for arrogance in a servant’s heart. A servant must be able to identify with those he or she is helping and convince them, “But by the grace of God, there go I.”

Finally, to be an effective servant you must be grateful for what God has done about your sinful condition. When Isaiah stood in the presence of God, he saw not only his sinfulness but also its consequences. “Woe to me! I cried. For I am ruined!” Isaiah 6:5. The word “ruined” means cut off, cut down, destroyed. What a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness!

How did God respond to Isaiah’s cry of despair? “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 you sin atoned for’ ” Isaiah 6:6-7. God took the initiative to forgive Isaiah and reverse the destructive process of sin in his life.

And how did Isaiah respond to God’s goodness and mercy? “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!’ ” Isaiah 6:8. What a change of heart and disposition for Isaiah. Earlier he felt separated from God and doomed to die. Now, he felt separated from sin and ready to live. God had taken care of his past, therefore, he was more than willing to give Him his future. Servanthood always begins with gratitude, doesn’t it?

Do you recall the words of Isaac Watts song “When I survey the Wondrous Cross?”

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

How true! Ask Isaiah.