

Isaiah 6:1-8, 9-13
We Have a Problem
WRCoB 6.4.23

I'm not a doomsayer.

Nor am I a pessimist or a negative person.

But I do believe the United States is in a national crisis.

First of all, we owe 31 trillion dollars and counting.

Trillion, billion, million

Heck, it's just 31 with a few zeros behind it right?

Here's what 31 trillion looks like.

31,000,000,000,000

But it's not just the debt or the economy.

It's the bad politics that prevent us from finding
Substantive solutions to many problems
In this great country of ours.

And it's not just the political divisions
That cut right through politics
Institutions, churches, and families.

Neither is it the disparity in the rich/poor gap.

Nor the decline in Christianity

It is all but more.

It's about the increased saber-rattling
And muscle-flexing from other powerful nations.

It is about climate change affecting our country
And having disastrous effects on poorer nations too.

But it's even more than that.

It is also on an individual level.

We have a mental health crisis
Manifesting itself in multiple ways.

Mass shootings and gun violence
The opioid endemic
High suicide rates among youth
Depression, anxiety, and loneliness

Americans have become selfish, self-centered, uncaring
Rude, and disrespectful.

And yet most Americans seem oblivious
Caught up in their own selfish gains.

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This is not unlike the times Isaiah lived in.

Today, I begin a four-part series on the Book of Isaiah.

Obviously, we cannot cover the whole book in four sermons.

But we can have a bit of an overview
As to what was happening during this time in Israel.

And pick up some pointers

In how to address issues we face today.

With the help and guidance from God.

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It as been pretty well established that the Book of Isaiah

Is a composite book made up of three Isaiahs

From three different periods of time.

Isaiah in Chapters 1-39 lived during the years

Between 738 till around 700 BC.

The second Isaiah in chapters 40-55

Lived during the Babylonian exile

Between the years of 597-539 BB.

And the third Isaiah in chapters 56-66

Lived in the period between 530-515 BC.

You might find some scholars who would argue this.

But the majority of today's scholars

Claim Isaiah is at least two different prophets

From two distinct time periods.

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First Isaiah lived in tumultuous times

In the northern kingdom.

The nation of Israel following King Solomon's reign

Had split into two nations.

The northern kingdom of Israel

And the southern kingdom of Judah.

Isaiah's own ministry began in the year King Uzziah died.

That would have been around 738 BC.

The nation as a whole had strayed
From a community that centered on God's love
And love for each other

To a nation not unlike ours
Where individual prosperity trumped national prosperity.

Where people were self-centered
And the tribes of Israel were divided.

And with King Uzziah's death
Things were beginning to happen
That the nation was ill-prepared for.

The international situation was extremely tense.

Egypt was rising to the west and south.

Syria was a growing threat to the north.

And Assyria was a menacing global power.

However, the people of Israel
Seemed blind to the growing threats.

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Isaiah has this doozy of a vision.

I'd call it a nightmare.

The atmosphere feels dark and sinister
And yet God is there on God's throne
With the hem of his garment filling the temple.

Seraphs were in attendance.
Smoked filled the room
And Isaiah was filled with gloom.

It feels like the day of judgment.

There was Isaiah standing before God
Like an accused before a court of law.

But instead of hearing a sentence of punishment
Isaiah is forgiven.

God now speaks.

Whom shall I send?
And who will go?

And as courageous as little Frodo in Tolkien's Trilogy

Isaiah responds, here I am, send me!

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God has called the nation to repentance
Over and over, time after time
Until God is blue in the face
If that's possible!

Now God is through trying to get through to these people!

God is past warning the people of Israel.

God tells Isaiah, preach to the people.

Let them hear but not comprehend

Let them see but not understand.

Make their minds dull

Plug their ears

Shut their eyes.

For how long, O Lord, Isaiah asks?

Until the cities lie waste and without inhabitants.

Houses without people

Land completely desolate

Until all are driven away

And emptiness is everywhere.

Isaiah 6:13 (CEV) If only a tenth of the people are left, even they will be destroyed. But just as stumps remain after trees have been cut down, some of my chosen ones will be left.

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God's message to Isaiah is one of gloom and doom.

There is nothing hopeful about it

Except for the stump

The imagery is one of exile

People driven away from their homes

Until all is desolate.

And who's to blame?

Why, the people of Israel!

They turned a blind eye to the problems and issues
Running rampant in the country.

They exchanged the truth for a pack of lies.

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Similarities?

Even though they were hearing Isaiah
They were not fully engaged
In what was being said.

Like the expression
“going in one ear and out the other”

There is a difference between hearing and listening.

Hearing (www.verywell.com)

- Passive
- Involuntary
- Requires no effort
- Physiological perception of sound

Listening (www.verywell.com)

- Active
- Voluntary
- Requires effort
- Intentional interpretation of sound

Often people hear rather than listen
Because they are thinking through their response
Even before the other is finished.

The website explains why.

- *You may not have learned the skill of listening—this is perhaps the most common reason.*
- *You may be busy, distracted, or daydreaming.*
- *You may have social anxiety, which can make it harder to listen because you are focused on planning what to say next or worried about what others are thinking about you.*

I would add one more.

We hear instead of listen

Because we are saturated with the opinion of others.

It is everywhere!

We can't escape the noise of opinion.

We hear it in the news

By our politicians

By our social media

And by our ministers.

It becomes so loud and annoying

That we tune it out.

And when we do

We tune out the good with the bad.

God is also speaking

But many turn a blind ear to God's truths.

And the truth of it is, is that the truth
That changes our personal lives
And our corporate lives as a nation
Is the truth most don't want to hear.

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So, what do we do?

Like Isaiah, we too need to recognize our own complicity

We too have unclean lips.

We too stand before the God of the universe.

With unclean lips, we speak gossip
Speak down to people
Spew hatred and lies

With unclean lips, we argue like we have the corner on truth.

We hear but do not listen
We look but do not understand

We have unclean lips
And we live with people with unclean lips.

We, as individuals and as a nation
Ought to humble ourselves before the Lord
And pray and seek God's grace and mercy.

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My grandfather preached a sermon in 1962 on this scripture
At the Terrace View Church of the Brethren
In Bedford Co., Virginia.

I have his sermon notes.

This is his concluding thoughts.

I think we are living in times of spiritual drought. The world is in a state of tension and men's hearts are failing them for fear.

But don't forget God has promised blessings when men turn to Him in penitence and faith.

Do we wish to do something to make this a better world in which we live?

Do we wish to see that righteousness which exalted a nation is established in the land?

Do we wish to see the "windows of Heaven" opened and blessings poured out?

Then this is what we need to do (Rev. Hubert N. Whitten Sr.)

2 Chronicles 7:14 NRSV if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

And so, whether the year is 738 BC

Or 1962

Or 2023

The formula is still the same.

Seek the Lord and his righteousness

And all good things will be added unto you!

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Let us pray a prayer from Sir Francis Drake.

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new Earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love."