

ISAIAH'S RESPONSE TO GOD

TAKEN FROM "ISAIAH: GOD SAVES SINNERS"

by Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. and R. Kent Hughes

ISAIAH CH. 6

For the first time in the passage, God speaks. It's as if he says, "All right, everyone, I have some things to say to the human race. I need a spokesman, and not just anyone. I want someone who knows what it means to be forgiven. Who might that be?" Isaiah pipes up, "How about me?" And God says, "Go."

What silences Christians is a curious mingling of self-admiration with a guilty fear that God is against them. His remedy is the blood of Christ purifying our consciences, so that we serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). A guilty conscience, liberated by grace, unleashes us. The gospel says to us, "That sin most damning to your conscience, that sin haunting your memory—Christ carried it far away to his cross, where it died under God's wrath. Justice has been satisfied. You are released!" The price we pay for this liberation is traumatic self-discovery before the all-holy God. We must be shocked into realizing that we're less Christian than we think we are, more American than we think we are, and unworthy of God. But that's when God comes, to experientialize to our hearts fresh cleansing in Christ. It is his grace alone that awakens us and qualifies us as his voices to our generation.

What is the remedy when our very capacity to respond to God shuts down? *The remedy for our deadness to God's grace is more grace.* The remedy is the touch of God himself, as the truth of the gospel breaks upon us with clarity. If God triumphs over us by his grace, we will live. If he doesn't, nothing in us will suffice, because our whole problem is our incapacity for self-renewal. This is how radically we need God.

God is fed up with Isaiah's generation (vv. 9, 10). So, he sends the prophet to tell them that they won't listen. A strange mission. His message would save later generations, but not his own, because God would use Isaiah's preaching to *harden* his contemporaries. This is not an easy truth to accept. And today, if preachers speak from Isaiah 6, they usually stop at the end of verse 8. But the authors of the New Testament quoted verses 9, 10 at least five times.⁷ They may be Isaiah's most frequently quoted verses in the New Testament. Why did the early Christians find them so meaningful? Because the young Christian movement was bitterly opposed for its gospel of grace, and the explanation for it stood out right here in these verses.

⁷ Matthew 13:14, 15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39–41; Acts 28:25–27.

What's the insight? Simply this. Every time you hear the Word of God preached, you come away from that exposure to his truth either a little closer to God or a little further way from God, either more softened toward God or more hardened toward God. But you are never just the same. And if you think you can hold the gospel at arm's length in critical detachment, that very posture reveals that you are already deadened. The same truth enlivening someone else is hardening you. And don't tell yourself that if only God would perform a miracle in your life, you would believe and open up. Jesus performed miracles, and the people who saw them only became further hardened (John 12:37–41). And if God's Word isn't saving you, what will? "Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).¹

¹ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. and R. Kent Hughes, [*Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 80–81.