

The Voice of Isaiah

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon highlights the importance of seeing and understanding Divine words and messages, and the consequences of not doing so, as exemplified in the story of Israel's failure to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1, John 5:44, John 12:36-41, Acts 13:27, Romans 10:21, Revelation 5:6

Topics: "Obedience to God's Word", "Spiritual Blindness"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound difference between merely hearing the words of the prophets and truly understanding their significance, as illustrated by the tragic blindness of Israel to the presence of Jesus, the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies. He highlights three key factors leading to this spiritual blindness: prejudice, self-interest, and inaction, which prevent people from recognizing and responding to divine truth. Sparks connects Isaiah's vision of the Lord with the ultimate revelation of Christ as the Lamb, underscoring the importance of believing and acting upon the light we receive. The sermon serves as a warning against the dangers of hardening our hearts and neglecting the call to obedience. Ultimately, it points to the Lamb on the throne as the ultimate authority and fulfillment of God's promises.

Transcript

"They knew not... the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath" (Acts 13:27).

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up..." (Isaiah 6:1).

"While ye have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of light... though he had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on him: that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (John 12:36-41).

Let us be reminded that what we are considering is the great difference between hearing Divine words and messages, and seeing Divine works, and really seeing through those things to their meaning. There is indeed a great difference between seeing and seeing through; between hearing with outward ears, and hearing with the inward ear. The context in history of our governing reference - Acts 13:27 - is the context of an unspeakable tragedy related to this difference. Both the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament are built upon this difference in seeing and at the same time not seeing, and hearing and yet not hearing. That is what we are coming to with Isaiah.

It is very impressive that John links together Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 53 in relation to the presence, ministry and work of Jesus - the Christ. John says that when Isaiah set down what he did, firstly: "Lord, who hath believed our report?", and the rest of chapter fifty-three; and then about his vision of "the Lord of Hosts", and the resultant commission as to Israel, "He spake of him" (Jesus) and it was when "he saw his glory". There is plenty to think about here. John says that the Lord whom Isaiah saw high and lifted up, and sitting upon a throne, "the Lord of Hosts", was Jesus. And in linking chapter fifty-three with chapter six John clearly affirmed that the "Lamb" of chapter fifty-three was "The Lord" of chapter six. We come back to that later.

What John is clearly saying is that, contrary to the great Prophet, Israel could have in their midst - in one Person - "The Lord" and "The Lamb" - with all their meaning, and yet not see, not hear, not recognize. All the wonderful enlightened ministry of Isaiah, and its actual fulfillment could be right amongst them and yet they not see. What is still worse: it could only result in a hardening rather than a saving. That is something terrible to contemplate! It is such a possibility, and - in Israel's case - such an actuality, which Paul carried over from Israel in general, in warning, to the Synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia; thus narrowing it down to a local company.

What was it that accounted for the judgment of blindness and deafness pronounced by Isaiah and made so evident in the days of Jesus Christ? There are at least three things that led to this, and will always lead to it.

1. Prejudice

The dictionary defines it as 'judgment reached beforehand'. It is drawing a conclusion before giving honest consideration. It is the closed mind and a closed heart. It is, not wanting to, and not intending to. It is, not being disposed to. The Prophets called it "Hardness of heart".

The closed heart will always result in closed eyes.

It is Henry Drummond who has - as a scientist - so forcibly illustrated this principle. In speaking of: "How shall we escape if we neglect..." he says: "There are certain burrowing animals - the mole, for instance - which have taken to spending their lives underground. And nature has taken her revenge upon them in a thoroughly natural way - she has closed up their eyes. If they mean to live in darkness, she argues, eyes are obviously a superfluous function. By neglecting them, these animals make it perfectly clear they do not want them. As one of nature's fixed principles is that nothing shall exist in vain, the eyes are presently taken away, or reduced to a rudimentary state. This is the meaning of the favourite paradox: 'From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' The presence of Jesus Christ among men, and the advent of the Holy Spirit, meant - and means - the possibility of seeing that which the natural eye cannot see; but 'neglect' or refuse 'the Light' and the judgment of double blindness is in the very nature of things; it is a law."

The terrible verdict to 'will not' is cannot.

Prejudice is a cruel and evil thing; it is a robber, a spoiler, in whatever realm it exists.

2. Self-interest

Israel's blindness was due to their fear of losing something if they yielded and obeyed. John quoted Jesus as saying: "How can ye believe, which receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the

only God ye seek not?" (John 5:44). Self-interest was the original sin of Adam, and by it the devil duped man into losing his spiritual faculties in relation to God. Pride it is that supports self-centredness. It was Israel's fall, as it was Satan's and Adam's.

3. Inaction

So often there is a large and fatal gap between knowing and doing. This is really the responsibility which the "Voices of the Prophets" laid at the door of Israel. The Lord has never judged people for what they did not know, or could not know, but always for not doing what they knew. Paul quotes Isaiah fifty-three in his great chapter on Israel's failure - Romans ten. He cries: "Did they not hear?" and answers: "Yea, verily." "But as to Israel he saith, All the day long did I spread out my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." This voice of the Prophet (Isaiah) has a large place in this paragraph, and it has to do with the blindness and deafness resultant from doing nothing about what they knew.

We are often greatly dismayed, distressed, and disconcerted by the great amount of preaching and teaching which has so very little outworking, and we wonder how much longer the Lord will allow the light to shine. We commenced this chapter with John's quotation of the words of Jesus: "While ye have the light, believe on the light." To believe is to walk in and obey the light. Too often the congregations and meetings of the Lord's people, after an earnest and challenging message, just dissolve into a noisy rabble of talk on anything but the message, and so the message is dissipated and lost. How often is the reaction: 'What can we do about what the Lord has said to us just now?' This, then, is the point in Isaiah's voice: "Who hath believed our report?"

Before leaving this for the time being, we must just return to that point of "the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up", "the Lord of Hosts", and the Lamb, of Isaiah six and fifty-three. It was in the year that earthly authority - as represented by King Uzziah - failed and departed that the authority in heaven was revealed to the Prophet. From that heavenly throne went forth the terrible judgment of double blindness and deafness. That state led on to not hearing the "report" and the consequent 'slaughtering of the Lamb of God'.

But ultimately the course of things is reversed. The Lamb is at last seen in the midst of the throne (Revelation 5:6), and that throne is seen to be the full and final authority in this universe. But what does the Lamb on the throne mean?

Hear Dr. F. B. Meyer:

"How does the Lamb come there? Surely meekness, humility, gentle submissiveness are not the virtues that win thrones! Perhaps not in man's world, but they are in God's. In the eternal world the passive virtues are stronger than the active: sufferers wield more might than wrestlers; to yield is to overcome; to be vanquished is to conquer. It is because Jesus was the Lamb that He is now God's anointed King."

This is the voice of the Prophet Isaiah.

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