

“Keep on Listening, but Do Not Understand”
(Isaiah 6:9-10)

Introduction.

- A. As we begin, we see Isaiah in the Lord’s holy council chamber.
 - 1. This is Isaiah’s call to be a prophet.
 - 2. The prophets were allowed to enter into the council chambers of God to hear His Word to bring it to His people. Those who weren’t admitted to His council went by their own authority to speak their own word.
 - 3. Listen to how the Lord reproves the false prophets in Jeremiah’s day: “Thus says the Lord hosts, ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise Me, “The Lord has said, ‘You will have peace’”; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, “Calamity will not come upon you.” But who has stood in the council of the Lord, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? Behold, the storm of the Lord has gone forth in wrath, even a whirling tempest; it will swirl down on the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; in the last days you will clearly understand it. I did not send *these* prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds” (Jer. 23:16-22).
 - 4. The true prophet has stood in the Lord’s council. The false prophet hasn’t. There are no longer any prophets in this sense, but there are those who stand up to declare His Word who stand in the council of the Lord as it is recorded in the pages of Scripture. What a sad commentary this is on our own day, when so many ministers preach their own words rather than the councils of God, as He has given us His Word.

- B. Isaiah stands in the Lord’s council chambers, but as he does, he sees the holiness of the Lord, and when he does, he realizes he is finished.
 - 1. He pronounces a curse upon himself. The holiness of God is too great for any mere man to stand in unwashed from his sins. If anyone of us were to stand in His presence, we would be destroyed.
 - 2. But the Lord has mercy on him. A seraph takes a coal from the altar and touches his lips, making atonement for him, saving his life. This represents the work Christ would do to take Isaiah’s sin away and make him able to stand in God’s presence.

- C. Then the Lord calls for someone to go to His people to speak His word to them, and Isaiah says, “Here am I. Send me!” (v. 8).
 - 1. The one who was afraid for his life, now wants to serve the Lord, even though it

will mean persecution and perhaps death.

2. This is the effect of God's grace. When we really understand what He has done for us, it makes us want to give Him our all and to risk whatever is necessary to bring Him glory.

D. And so the Lord commissions him to go to preach to His people, but it won't be easy.

1. This is not a mission of mercy to the Jewish people, but a mission of judgment.
2. He is not sending him to a people whose heart He will open, but to those whom He will harden.
3. What I want us to consider this evening is how this passage relates to Christ's prophetic ministry. We've seen the blessings that His preaching brought and continues to bring. But we need to realize that His ministry was also a ministry of judgment.

II. Sermon.

A. We know that the ministry of Christ came with many blessings, as we've seen.

1. He was sent by God to open the eyes of the blind, to unstop the ears of the deaf (Is. 35:5), to quicken the dead to life, to give those with hearts of stone hearts of flesh.
2. He was sent to bring light to those in darkness, to free the prisoner, to deliver those who were being delivered over to death (Is. 42:7; 49:9).
3. We know these blessings and have experienced them, and we should be very thankful for them.

B. But Christ's ministry was also one of judgment.

1. We don't often think about this, but it's true.
2. This is the commission that God is giving to Isaiah, who was a type of Christ.
 - a. Look at what the Lord was sending him to do: He says, "Go and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and return and be healed" (vv. 9-10).
 - b. Even those who are inclined to interpret everything in the Bible in a positive way can't get around the fact that this is judgment. Literally, the Lord is telling Isaiah to make their hearts hard, their ears deaf and their eyes blind. They would listen to him, but not understand. They would look, but not learn.
 - c. And how long was this to continue? This is what Isaiah asked, and this is what the Lord told him, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, houses are without people, and the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land" (vv. 11-12).
 - d. It was to continue until the Lord had finished pouring out His wrath on His people, until He has swept them all away into exile.
 - e. But even in the midst of His judgment, we still see something of His mercy: there will be a tenth portion left, a remnant (v. 13).

3. But as I said, Isaiah was a type of Christ. Just as Isaiah was sent to God's people in his day to preach God's truth only to be met with opposition, so that the people still went into exile, so Jesus was sent for the same purpose.
 - a. This is one of the reasons He spoke to them in parables. The psalmist prophesied that He would. "Listen, O my people, to my instruction; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us" (Ps. 78:1-3).
 - b. Why did He do this? The disciples asked the same question. They came to Him and said, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" And He answered and said to them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall *more* be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I should heal them." But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*" (Matt. 13:10-17).
 - c. Christ hid the truth from the leaders of His people because His Father was intending to bring judgment on them. Jesus preached, but they didn't turn. They were swept out of the land into exile by the Romans.
 - d. But those who were His children understood, because it pleased the Father to reveal it to them. After Jesus pronounced judgment on Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, He then said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from *the* wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight" (Matt. 11:25-26).
 - e. Even when Jesus made His truth perfectly clear, they still rejected it. Why? It's because the Word of God has two effects on its hearers: it can soften or harden.
 - f. What makes the difference? The difference is solely in the Lord's hands.
 - (i) When He wills to bring someone to Himself, He will soften their hearts with the gracious work of His Spirit.
 - (ii) But when He wills to harden their hearts, He withdraws the work of His Spirit.
 - (iii) He doesn't harden their hearts by doing anything, but by not doing something.
 - (iv) The Spirit is the One who holds back the sin of men's hearts. If the Lord

wants to give them over to judgment, He simply withdraws His Spirit which they don't deserve anyway.

4. Isaiah went to preach to Judah, but they didn't turn and were brought into exile.
 - a. The same thing happened when Paul went to preach to the Jews at Rome, and many didn't listen to him and were lost (Acts 28:24-27).
 - b. As we've seen, Christ went to preach to His own people. He spoke to them in parables as a judgment against them. He didn't explain them as judgment against them. But even when He did declare God's truth to them plainly, they wouldn't receive it as judgment against them. God had determined to harden their hearts so that they wouldn't, and it was through the same Word He uses to bring the lost to Himself.
 - c. This is the judgment Isaiah is speaking about here. In each of these cases, they all refer to this prophecy. It was the ministry of judgment against the enemies of God.
 - d. Of course, what makes this relevant to us is that the Lord still uses His Word in the same two ways today. It always has one of these two effects on everyone according to His will – it either softens or hardens.
 - e. We need to recognize this when we go out to evangelize.
 - f. But we need to recognize this when we judge our own response to the Word.

III. Application.

- A. Make sure that your heart is soft to God's truth, that you love it, that you want to receive it, that you are inclined to do it and submit to it, whatever it says.
 1. If the ministry of God's Word hardens your heart, that's a bad sign.
 - a. Sometimes the Lord withdraws His Spirit for a time allowing our hearts to be hardened to chasten us.
 - b. He doesn't do it entirely, but partially, to teach us to keep closer to Him.
 - c. But if there is no softness in our hearts at all, then we are unconverted. If the Word only hardens us – and this is one of the hard truths of Scripture – then we are unconverted.
 - d. In this case, we need to pray that the Lord would soften our hearts by His Spirit.
 2. But if its admonitions and reproofs soften your heart, that's a good sign.
 - a. A gracious heart receives whatever the Lord says – the commands and threats, as well as the promises.
 - b. And he receives it thankfully, because he knows it is good for him.
- B. Be careful how you hear.
 1. Isaiah preached – some listened and some did not. Jesus preached, some listened and some did not. Paul preached, some were persuaded of the truth, and some weren't.
 2. Those who listened and responded were saved. Those who refused to listen were lost. Let's examine our hearts to make sure we are listening to the Lord.