

**Challenges in the Crisis:
The Challenge of Faithfulness
Isaiah 6:9-13**

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Text Introduction: We return to the book of Isaiah this morning. With the exception of a few Sundays here and there for special emphases, we have been in the book of Isaiah in this latter part of the year. We are considering this book from the general theme of “Crisis,” because it is a prophetic message from a time of crisis in Isaiah’s day, focused on the nation of Israel and more precisely, Judah. To this point, we have examined the *Confrontation that Comes from Crisis*, the *Comfort for our Crisis*, and have begun to see the *Challenges in the Crisis*. We noted two weeks ago that one challenge we face in the midst of crisis is the challenge to worship.

Today, we return to Isaiah 6. Two weeks ago, we considered 6:1-8, but today we consider 9-13. This chapter contains Isaiah’s call. We usually stop at verse 8 and that is unfortunate, because there is an important lesson about God’s call that we need to see in verses 9-13. It will help us to see a second challenge we face in our times of crisis—the challenge of faithfulness.

Text: And he replied:

Go! Say to these people:

Keep listening, but do not understand;
keep looking, but do not perceive.

¹⁰ Make the minds of these people dull;
deafen their ears and blind their eyes;
otherwise they might see with their eyes
and hear with their ears,
understand with their minds,
turn back, and be healed.

¹¹ Then I said, “Until when, Lord?” And he replied:

Until cities lie in ruins without inhabitants,
houses are without people,
the land is ruined and desolate,
¹² and the LORD drives the people far away,
leaving great emptiness in the land.

¹³ Though a tenth will remain in the land,
it will be burned again.

Like the terebinth or the oak
that leaves a stump when felled,
the holy seed is the stump.

Introduction: When we say “Yes,” to God, we would want to assume that from that moment on, our lives would be free of crisis. God would always bless, in our terms of blessing. We would never have any problems. Our lives would be better and better until we die and go to Heaven to live there forever.

But, this is not the record of Scripture, the testimony of other believers, or our own personal experience.

In fact, as an example, consider the testimony of the Apostle Paul, after his conversion.

. . . with far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, many times near death.

²⁴ Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the Jews.²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. ²⁶ On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, and dangers among false brothers; ²⁷ toil and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and without clothing. ²⁸ Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)

Who wants to sign up for that? And, this challenges us.

One of the great challenges during crisis is to continue to be faithful.

God raised up Isaiah to be a prophet to call Judah to repentance before judgment. Generations of sin had not escaped the notice of a holy God. Through a prophet like Isaiah, God was calling individuals to repentance.

In verses 1-8, Isaiah answers that call while in worship. We usually stop there on the crescendo of Isaiah's commitment, "Here I am. Send me." But, the call dialogue is not over with verse 8, and what follows might surprise us. In this dialogue is where we get a wonderful example of continued faithfulness even in the midst of crisis.

The Call Clarified

- Response Prophesied

Actually, it is a lack of response that is prophesied. This prophetic announcement prompts the question, "Until when?" In other words, "How long are you going to ask me to do this?" God's reply is not encouraging to a preacher who might long for a results-oriented preaching ministry.

- Remnant Promised

But, there will be a stump—a remnant that is left of those who do believe.

These are challenging verses. One reader will see in these verses that God is the author of causing some not to believe and repent. But, we need not read these verses that way. Remember this, in context, is Isaiah's call. God is simply revealing, in advance, to Isaiah, that his preaching will not produce much, if any result, but the question is on Isaiah's faithfulness. So, we take these verses in that context and the focus is on Isaiah's faithfulness to his call.

The Challenge Identified

So, from this prophetic revelation, we see several principles related to the definition of real faithfulness.

- Faithfulness is about you, not others.
- Faithfulness is about call, not circumstances.
- Faithfulness is about surrender, not success.
- Faithfulness is about the end, not everything.

So What?

- Be faithful today!

This is where all faithfulness begins. What is your plan for being faithful today? I said this to our men a few months back at breakfast as a personal strategy. Wake up, Read up, Pray up, so you don't mess up, and do it all over again tomorrow.

- Be faithful in crisis!
- Be faithful in what God said last!
- God is the ultimate judge of faithfulness!

A Closing Word

In Isaiah 30, we have a good word about faithfulness. This was the theme verse of Bible School a few summers ago. It has stayed with me.

Isaiah 30:20-21

The Lord will give you meager bread and water during oppression, but your Teacher will not hide any longer. Your eyes will see your Teacher,²¹ and whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear this command behind you: "This is the way. Walk in it."

Story from Nik Ripken

A couple of weeks ago, I heard a missionary by the name of Nik Ripken speak. Nik (not his real name) has ministered to the persecuted church for the last 30 years. He told this story which appears in his book *The Insanity of God*.

Many of the stories that I heard in Russia celebrated God's faithfulness and provision.

One pastor was arrested and placed in prison, while his wife and children were sent to live (or die) in Siberia.

One wintry night in their remote, dilapidated wooden cabin which now served as their home, the three children divided their family's last crust of bread, and drank the last cup of tea in the house before climbing into bed still hungry. Kneeling to say their prayers, they asked, "Where are we going to get some more food, Mama? We're hungry! Do you think Papa even knows where we live now?" Their mother assured them their heavenly Father knew where they lived. For now, He was the one who would have to provide. They prayed and asked for God's provision.

Thirty kilometers away (about 18 ½ miles), in the middle of the night, God woke up the deacon of a church and instructed him, "Get out of bed, harness your horse, hitch the horse to the sled, load up all the extra vegetables that the church has harvested, the meat, and the other food that the congregation has collected, and take it to the pastor's family living outside the village. They are hungry!"

The deacon said, "But, Lord, I can't do that! It's below Zero outside. My horse might freeze and I might freeze!"

The Holy Spirit told him, "You must go! The pastor's family is in trouble!"

The man argued, "Lord, you've got to know that there are wolves everywhere. They could eat my horse and if they do, they'll then eat me! I'll never make it back."

But the deacon said that the Holy Spirit told him, "You don't have to come back. You just have to go."

So he did.

When he knocked loudly on the door of that rickety cabin in the pre-dawn darkness the next morning, the banging must have terrified the mother and her children. But imagine their joy and amazement when they fearfully, hesitantly opened the cabin door to find one very small, very cold member of the Body of Christ standing on their front step. His food-laden sleigh was behind him. He held a huge sack and announced, "Our church collected this food for you. Be fed. When this runs out, I'll bring more."

Long after I heard that story I kept thinking about God's final instruction to the deacon: "YOU JUST HAVE TO GO."

YOU DON'T HAVE TO COME BACK. YOU JUST HAVE TO GO.

As it turns out, he did come back. Even so, the instruction is clear. You just have to go. You just have to go. Even if there is no clarity about your return, you just have to go.

The memory of that deacon's courageous obedience lives on in his story. The story has been told by his family for generations. And the story is also told by the extended family of those who were saved by his gift. The story celebrates one man's obedience and God's miraculous provision. (Ripkin, Nik, *The Insanity of God*, (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), pp. 166-167.)

When crisis comes, we have to continue to be faithful.

And whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear this command behind you: "This is the way. Walk in it."