

The Pathway to Usefulness: Consecration Isaiah 6

The pathway to usefulness is consecration. That is the pathway that God had to lead Isaiah along. That is the pathway we all need to follow.

Only what is attached to God will last forever. Anything that is not attached to God needs to be detached from our lives. As we open to Isaiah 6, think about the balance sheet of your life. As one famous missionary once said while laying on his deathbed, "Only one life, t'will soon be past; and only what's done for Christ will last"!

That means the most important measure of life is how useful we are to God. The only enduring parts of our life will be those spent serving God.

Just about everyone who goes to a Bible teaching church for very long knows about the Great Commission. The last two verses of Matthew are Jesus Christ telling us why we stay on Earth after He saves us. We are here He said, to do what He called, designed, and left us to do. Proclaim the Gospel. But for 95% or more of all believers, outreach, missions, and evangelism is hard at best, and undone by most.

But for most of us we are painfully aware that each day is an uphill climb, going against the tide in a very fallen world. So how exactly can we best do what God left us to do? How do we reach a fallen world all around us? How do we serve God in the world we live in that seeks to neutralize us and short-circuit anything we do for God?

Instead of more messages to make us feel guilty for not reaching the world, God shows us His way to reach out for Him. And its not something new, His plan is old, tried, and true. When we look closely we see that God's plan for preparing us to be used as His servants has not changed in thousands of years. Open with me to Isaiah 6, and the amazing call God gave to Isaiah.

God Called Isaiah to Consecration

From the Old Testament we find that our unchanging, immutable God has the same plan. To reach the godless society God called him to reach, Isaiah was told a timeless truth. More than anything you do, God is interested in who you are. The key to usefulness in life, doing what God designed us to do, is first being what God wants us to be.

Listen to God's voice as He tells us the story of His call and preparation of Isaiah. In this chapter we'll read we see 5 keys to a life that is useful to God. In the end, that is all that will matter.

Isaiah 6:1-13 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 So I said: " Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts." 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth with it, and said: " Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away; And your sin purged." 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: " Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." 9 And He said, "Go, and tell this people: ' Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' 10 " Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed." 11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: " Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate, 12 The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. 13 But yet a tenth will be in it, And will return and be for consuming, As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump."

Simply stated we can conclude from a careful study of the Bible that:

God's Desire for Each of us is Consecration

There are 5 stages that are keys to usefulness for God. There is a pathway for each of us who want to follow that leads us into daily, monthly, and life-long usefulness to God.

Here are the stages. Let me tell you what they are and then show them as they are described in these verses. God wants you and me to:

- Remember God's Holiness
- Realize my Sinfulness
- Receive God's Cleansing
- Respond to God's Calling
- Remain Faithful to God no matter what

Now trace these truths into your Bibles with me. Write them down so that you can come back often and remind yourself of these simple truths that have been repeatedly taught and explained to God servants for all of the 2,700 years since God spoke them to Isaiah.

First, to be useful to God we must always **Remember God's Holiness** (that is the message of Isaiah 6:1-4). God is by nature holy. He is separate from sin, perfect, sinless, flawless and pure. So no matter how compassionate He is, no matter how full of grace and overflowing with mercy: God is still Holy, Holy, Holy. In the realm of eternity, around the Throne at the center of the Universe there is one word that is repeated regularly, over and over again. Holy, Holy, Holy is our God.

For many of us, just saying or hearing those words begins a song playing in our hearts and minds. Do you know that song? To help impress this truth upon our souls, join me in the hymnbook before you at # _____.

Stand and with just our voices, lift these truths to God, from each voice and heart, agree with what God wants us to do: **Remember God's Holiness.**

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!
2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.
3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love and purity.
4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

The first key to any usefulness for eternity is: Remembering God's holiness. Repeat that with me all together: **Remember God's Holiness.** Say it again, louder and confidently so it stays on our hearts: **Remember God's Holiness.** Thinking about His Holy Presence and standing before His Throne, and falling on our faces before Him, leads us to the second key. Being useful to God means thinking long and deeply upon how far we fall short of His Glory, and how much we need His gracious, forgiving, and cleansing touch.

Second, to be useful to God I must always **Realize my Sinfulness** (that is the message of Isaiah 6:5). The closer we get to the Light, the more of our sinfulness we can see. When Job came to understand the Almighty El-Shaddai he confessed (Job 42:5-6).

When Peter saw the power of God the Son displayed he cried out (Luke 5:8) "depart from me, I am a sinful man". And when John the Beloved Apostle, saw Christ in his unveiled glory on Patmos, he fell at His feet as if dead (Revelation 1:17). The theme of those who stand around the Throne is that the Lamb who was slain, was slain for their sin. He gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20) was Paul's testimony. The closer we are to God's Holiness the more I Realize my own personal Sinfulness.

Again, the testimony of saints who have walked this path before us can help us frame fitting words to express our need of the Redeeming Lamb's precious shed blood. In our hymn book turn to # ____ "There is a Fountain" and join me again with just your voices declaring that though we are great sinners, our Savior is greater and He washes ALL my sins away.

1. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.
Lose all their guilty stains, lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.
2. The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.
Washed all my sins away, washed all my sins away;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.
3. Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin no more.
Be saved, to sin no more, be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin no more.
4. E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die.
And shall be till I die, and shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die.
5. Then in a nobler, sweeter song, I'll sing Thy power to save,
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave.
Lies silent in the grave, lies silent in the grave;
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave.

Thirdly, to be useful to God we need to **Receive God's Cleansing** (that is the message of Isaiah 6:6-7). When we Remember God's Holiness, the Light of our Holy God makes us Realize our Sinfulness. That leads us to the work of the Cross, to the sacrifice Christ offered once perfectly and completely to pay the penalty of sin for all who come by faith. Usefulness comes to those who will be cleansed and who will walk in the light and stay full of God's Spirit.

The most useful servant is a humble believer who readily confesses the complete cleansing that the gracious work of Jesus accomplished. Once we are assured of His cleansing the evil one can't find a place to plant seeds of doubt and despair. We can

affirm that God will never condemn me (Romans 8:1); and that though my sins were as deeply staining me as crimson I am white as snow in God's sight. That truth makes us full of His hope, welling up with the joy of the Spirit, and kept by His Peace.

To the end of our lives, whether in weakness, sickness, or even dementia (as the great hymn writer John Newton suffered at the last years of his life) we can confidently express our conviction that though we were great sinners, Jesus is a Great Savior. Why not practice stating your testimony aloud with me right now, through his words you know so well:

1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

Fourthly, Isaiah learned that usefulness to God meant that he had to **Respond to God's Calling** (that is the message of Isaiah 6:8-10). Remember where we started? Most of us have heard of the Great Commission, but few of us have surrendered to it. God says that my usefulness is tied to a response to His call. God wants me offering my life back to Him. He wants me to be His servant.

A servant is simply one who does the will of another. God's servants do His will. God has expressed His will through His Word, and in His church. We are called to be His people living for Him on earth. As a part of His church we are to gather and encourage one another more and more as the days get darker and the evil of the end of days overspreads the world. We are only called to do what only God can do through us. It isn't about us, our calling is all about God. We are just the servants, the tool, the willing vessel that is clean and fit for the Master's use.

What holds us back is not any lack of His power, but of our unwillingness to become His servant. Salvation is of the Lord, and all power has been given Christ in Heaven and on Earth. All that remains are the eyes of the Lord that go throughout the earth to find servants through whom God can be strong.

Raise the hand of your faith and say to God, "Here am I Lord, send me, use me, show yourself strong in my life."

Then finally, the last key to usefulness is **Remain Faithful to God** no matter what (that is the message of Isaiah 6:11). Isaiah asked, "How long?" The Lord says it doesn't matter how long you wait, how hard life is, just stay faithful. To succeed we only need to get started following God and never quit. The writer of Hebrews sums up what most of us will experience, "These all died in faith" without seeing Christ's coming, without seeing the final triumph of Christ over all evil; and without seeing Jesus as the returning Lord of Glory right all wrongs.

So what does it take to be useful to God? It is simple. God wants us me to:

- Remember God's Holiness

- Realize my Sinfulness
- Receive God's Cleansing
- Respond to God's Calling
- Remain Faithful to God no matter what

Now we get to the essence of what we will be learning for most of this year if the Lord allows us to live and serve Him through 2010. As we turn to the book of Titus we see that God's plans are the same. The way Paul was told to reach the world was to lead the church to see our great God, to allow His Spirit to point out sin that needs to be repented of; and then receive the complete new beginning each moment we rest in Christ's blood that cleanses us from all sin. Titus 1 reminds us of the very clear plans God has laid down to make us useful in our very ungodly generation.

Before any of us try to excuse ourselves, saying that it is too hard to change—Paul reminds us how tough a group this letter of Titus was sent to. Paul's letter to Pastor Titus, the missionary church-planter to Crete—gives quite a description of the cultural background of the congregation Titus served two thousand years ago. It sounds strangely familiar to what the news reports say about the culture we face right now.

Titus 1:12-13 One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith (NKJV)

That's why we have these 2,000 year old words Paul gave to Titus before us this morning. For this young, missionary pastor/church-planter serving on the Roman provincial island of Crete, the challenge to train men and women in godliness was foremost.

Cretans, who descended from the Old Testament era pagans we know as the Philistines, were the raw materials from which God was going to make godly men and women. What a miracle that an entire generation of believers were saved, out of such a godless society. That is why I call this passage the plan God has given all of us to:

Grace-energized Living in a Sin-energized World

God says I have the power to make you able to be a godly man even when the whole world around you is ungodly! We need to underline again in our Bibles, those descriptive words of what Cretans were like culturally.

Paul reminds us that they came from centuries of culture dominated by three deeply set habits. These Cretans were in God's perspective, people of: **total untrustworthiness** ('always liars'), **total out-of-control living** ('evil beasts'), and the **total undisciplined pursuit of personal lust-filled appetites** ('lazy gluttons').

But even in that type of atmosphere, permeated by sin, God's grace allows us to say no to sin and yes to walking in His Spirit. Just like the pioneer missionaries found in modern

times, God can change lives even in cultures dominated for centuries by immense evil. Look at Paul's inspired words:

*Titus 1:12-13 One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." **This testimony is true.** Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith (NKJV)*

Again we see from these two verses that when the Gospel of Jesus Christ entered the Roman world of the New Testament the landscape was very bleak. Christ's church was born into a sin-warped, sin-darkened world of mixed-up marriages, sin-scarred lives, and confused families.

I really believe that this insight into the Cretan culture can stir our hearts to glorify the amazing grace and saving power of God.

- If the Gospel of Christ can reach into a culture of people who were the descendents of the wicked, pagan Old Testament Philistines and build them into grace-energized servants of Christ's church—**He can work with any man, no matter what his past.**
- If God can make saints out of people who had so descended in their personal character until Paul describes them with this trio of disparaging words—**He can change any man no matter how weak, how wicked, how undisciplined.**

That is why Titus 2 goes on to tell us that...

God has a Six Desires For Every Mature Man

What was the plan God had in mind to transform the men of Crete? The same plan He has for all the mature men of Christ's church! Follow along as I read Titus 2:1-2:

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience;

Six qualities are to become the life-priorities for grace-energized men. Note the first trio of godly choices in verse 2:

Titus 2:2 that the older men be **sober, reverent, temperate**, sound in faith, in love, in patience.

These qualities can be defined as:

1. MAINTAINING A BALANCED LIFE IN AN OBSESSIVE-COMPLUSIVE WORLD

That is the word in v. 2a "sober". Next:

2. GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT LIFE IN AN AMUSED WORLD

That is the word in v.2b "reverent".

3. LIVING A CONSISTENT LIFE IN A FOOLISH WORLD

That is the word in v.2c "temperate".

Then Paul gives the second trio of qualities...**Sound in faith, in love, in patience.**

4. GUARDING A HEALTHY MIND IN A SICK WORLD

That is the word in v.2d "sound in faith".

5. STAYING TENDER HEARTED IN A CRUEL WORLD

That is the word in v.2e "[sound] in love".

6. FINISHING HOPEFULLY IN A DESPAIRING WORLD

That is the word in v.2f "[sound] in patience".

Grace-energized men living in a sin-energized world is God's plan.

God is on the lookout for men who are sold-out, full-hearted, true-seekers of Him.

The standard we are to follow, and for which we will answer to Him is the clear list of character-choices laid down in God's Word. These six are what God expects, what God wants, what His grace can energize you to become—if only you will yield to Him.

As you sit before Him this morning—what does God see you really are on the inside? Does He see a longing on your part to be all that He wants you to be?

If not, why not surrender to Him right now? Bow your head and heart before the Lord and whisper to Him in your heart that you want to become the man He wants you to be starting TODAY!