

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series: Exposition of Romans
Number: 117
Text: Romans 10:9-11; Isaiah 6:8
Date: June 15, 2008 (am)

Pastor/Teacher
Gary L.W. Johnson

SAVED: FROM WHAT? (Part III)

Motivational speakers are in big demand in practically all branches of the professing Christian church, especially within the so-called evangelical wing. These high-profile men and women are usually described in their brochures as *winsome*, *humorous* and very *dynamic*. They are advertised as being able to communicate at any level and are guaranteed to be a big hit with the audience. They ooze with personal confidence and convey a positive perspective that is positively contagious. These super-achievers have the knack of motivating people to pursue excellence and success in whatever field of endeavor they choose. There is nothing innately wrong with this. All of us have probably at one time or another needed someone to motivate us. It may have been a teacher or a coach or a relative. The New Testament actually speaks of a spiritual gift that closely parallels this—it's called the gift of exhortation (cf. Romans 12:8).¹ We all need to be motivated in our duties and obligations. We especially need to be motivated in our service to God. This can, however, be done in a decidedly unbiblical fashion. People, for instance, are often motivated to action out of a sense of guilt. They erroneously think they can make amends for past failings by devoting themselves to some worthwhile cause. Other people are often motivated to action because they hope to gain personal success (be it monetary or recognition). What was it that motivated the prophet Isaiah to a renewed commitment to God?

I. THE DESIGN OF THE VISION

Isaiah's vision was not simply intended to provide the prophet with a deeply moving experience (which it most certainly was). God appeared to Isaiah in glorious majesty for the purpose of equipping the prophet anew with his calling to be God's mouthpiece to a rebellious nation.

- A. The Voice of the Lord. Having his sin and guilt removed, Isaiah is quick to hear the Word of God. It is the case, is it not, that sin does prevent us from being attentive to the Word of God? Once we address an area of disobedience, we find ourselves more attentive to God's Word. Note as well, the overwhelming sense of gratitude Isaiah expresses at having experienced forgiveness, especially after having been confronted with the awesome presence of a holy God.²
- B. God Asks Questions. "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"³ God is not soliciting information, rather, as William Perkins observes, "Here the Lord asks men who purely seek and undertake this task to make their priority to honour God and to gather his church, and then in all their work and ministerial duties truly to strive for the same goals: preaching God's Word as God's Word, diligently reproving, exhorting, and admonishing their people and shining before them in lives marked by good works."⁴
- C. Isaiah's Response. "So ready a reply," remarks Calvin, "shows how great is that cheerfulness which springs from faith; for he who but lately lay like a dead man dreads no difficulty."⁵ What accounts for the Prophet's willingness? Why is he so anxious to be sent? "Here in this matchless passage we find the reason why so few are willing to serve God. They need above all the conviction of sin. Only when a man has been convicted of sin and has understood that the Redeemer has borne the guilt of his sin is he willing and ready joyfully to serve God, to go wherever God may call him. Does our day and age have any greater need than the preaching of the law, that men may know of their sin, and the gospel, that they may look to Him who has turned aside their iniquity and pardoned their sin?"⁶

CONCLUSION: It is possible that people can be motivated to serve God either out of the desire to alleviate guilt or with the hope of securing some kind of personal gain. Then again, there are countless examples of individuals who are *zealous* to serve God for all the *wrong* reasons (Rom. 10:2). Those involved in what goes by the name *Emergent* fall into this category: “Along with jettisoning penal substitution, many leaders in the emergent church are undermining other crucial aspects of biblical soteriology. For example, Chalke flatly rejects original sin, claiming ‘Jesus believed in original goodness.’ Similarly, Tomlinson finds total depravity ‘biblically questionable, extreme, and profoundly unhelpful.’ Instead of being dead in our sins and trespasses, we ‘can choose how to *actualize* ourselves to become more fully human by making choices about our relationships to each other and God. We can choose to grow spiritually, morally, and intellectually. The *imago Dei* is not a fixed *nature* but a capacity to *be* God-like.’ So the atonement did not accomplish anything on our behalf. God’s attitude toward us didn’t change. Jesus simply enacted and represented the forgiveness that was already in the heart of God. It’s no wonder, then, that the suffering and death of Christ in much emergent writing becomes evidence of how valuable we are to God. Jesus didn’t condemn and judge His disciples. They needed to be encouraged to achieve their true potential. Their question was not, do I believe in God?, as much as does God believe in me? The main problem in the universe, according to many emergent writers, seems to be human suffering and brokenness. Make no mistake, suffering and brokenness are a result of the fall, but the main problem that needs to be dealt with is human sin and rebellion. Where sin is the main problem we need a crucified Substitute. Where pain and brokenness are the main problems, we need to learn to love ourselves. God is no longer a holy God angry with sin, who, in His great mercy, sent His Son to die on our behalf so that divine justice might be satisfied. God becomes a vulnerable lover who opens Himself up to hurt and rejection in order to be with us because we are worth dying for. I have no doubt that this message will find a receptive audience, but it is not the message the apostles proclaimed and for which they died. Christians don’t get killed for telling people that God believes in them and suffers like them and can heal their brokenness. They get killed for calling sinners to repentance and proclaiming faith in the crucified Son of God as the only means by which we who were enemies might be reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10).”⁷ Isaiah did not shape his message to appeal to his audience. He was gripped by not only the glorious grandeur of God but the experience of genuine forgiveness. How could he but respond the way he did? Forgiveness moved the prophet to obedience and a desire to serve—regardless of the assigned task.

ENDNOTES

¹ Exhortation in the Scriptural sense has to do with comfort, encouragement and admonition (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 and 1 Timothy 4:13-14). It is designed, as C. E. Cranfield has pointed out, “to help Christians to live out their obedience to the gospel.” A Critical and Exegetical Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans II (T & T Clark, 1979), p. 623.

² Martin Luther once wrote: “In the presence of God all men must lower their plumes and be glad that they can obtain forgiveness. And whatever a man may do, let him not think that as long as he lives here on earth, he will ever progress beyond the need of this forgiveness. In short, if God does not forgive sins without ceasing, we are lost.” What Luther Says I, ed. E. M. Plass (Concordia, 1959), p. 522.

³ Why does God in the first part of the question use the singular “I” and in the second part switch to the plural “us?” Is he including the seraphim? This is not possible. Nowhere else in Scripture is God ever portrayed as deliberating with His creatures in the execution of His plans and purposes. “In carrying out His sovereign purposes, God consults only with Himself. He has no need of counseling with His creatures, even with angelic creatures. Hence, it would seem wise to adopt the time-honored interpretation of the church and to regard the Lord as using the plural form to indicate that in the Speaker Himself there is a plurality of persons.” E. J. Young, The Book of Isaiah I (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 254.

⁴ W. Perkins, The Art of Prophesying (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1996), p. 176.

⁵ Calvin’s Commentaries VII (rpt. Baker, 1993), p. 213.

⁶ Young, op. cit., p. 254.

⁷ Kevin Deyoung and Ted Kluck, Why we’re NOT Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be) (Moody, 2008) p. 194.