

GOD IN THE WILDERNESS

by Lester J. Start

Undated

Introduction

The call of Isaiah - the incident portrayed. Isaiah, a young man, feeling the desperate condition of his people, bowed down by cares, has an experience of the revelation of God at a church.

The writer uses extravagant language to describe the significant meaning of the experience. Just as a poet does to express beauty, or a lover to express his love, - illustration of a Bach air described as drawing the tail of a dead horse over the entrails of a dead sheep - the symbols help describe the feeling.

What did Isaiah experience?

I. The sovereignty of God.

Our idea of God has shrunk as the idea of the world grows. We speak of seeking Him as though He were lost - we wonder on whose side He is in the war as if being on His side were unimportant - we suggest He ought to stop at all - we press on Him our yardsticks - we say its no use to pray for anything except moral courage and a better disposition - we make God comport with our ideas - and we deny what we do not understand.

Barth: Were we to hear of a God who measures up to our rule and can do just what we can do ourselves, what need have we of such a God? We cannot understand all the ways of God. We press our doubts but we cannot push God away. Illustration of captain sending friend to death. The idea of the power and sovereignty of God as air power in war. God is greater than pain, than loss, great enough to care about us. Shakespeare. William Temple - He is a beast, but a just beast. Washington.

II. The sinfulness of man, his inadequacy.

What is man? Our opinion is a queer mixture of self-contempt and self-esteem. A fortuitous concourse of atoms. A disease of matter on the epidermis of a pygmy planet. A little lower than the angels. The original sin of man - the passions that drag him down. (Yet he keeps struggling for a beauty beyond him. Why Jesus had to come.) The Son of man has not where to rest his head. "There can be no man without God. Despair, as man's senses conflict between what he is and what he should be. From within, from the heart of man, the designs of evil come.

III. The mission of man - Isaiah's call.

Religion is not interested in God, or in using God, but being used. Story of the E. Stanley Jones

Oh God, who has been our help in ages past and art are hoped for the years to come, we thank Thee for Thy faithfulness, of which there is no end. We praise Thee for the gift of life, which Thou alone canst bestow, and for Thy unfailing love which overarches all our days. Forgive us that we so often live in so feverishly as if we had no Father in heaven, as if we were orphans in an alien world. Here in the quiet of this holy place, may we again become sensitive to Thy presence.

Drop the still dews of quietness until all our striving cease -

Take from our souls the strain and stress and let our ordered lives confess

The beauty of Thy peace.

Prayer.

Eternal Spirit in whom we live and move and have our being - author of our spirits, we pray for a real sense of Thy presence in our lives. The world is too much with us, with all its joys and sorrows, cares and responsibilities, so that our attention is centered upon the things of time and sense. Our vision is so concerned with the world in which we live, that we do not lift our eyes unto the hills, unto God from whom cometh our help. Give us to know, Oh God, that our lives must grope blindly without the guide and direction from Thee.

So infuse us with Thy spirit of courage, and strength, and vision that we may face the world with the calm confidence of those whose trust is in Thee. Help us to see beyond the imperfections and evils to Thy perfection and goodness struggling for expression. Help us to seize the dream of God for his people, let it capture our imaginations, so that we may work together with Him for the triumph of good. Give us to know that if we are with God, we are in the majority; may we never be content with lesser values, but hold fast to that which is good, even if it appears beyond our reach, and alien in a mundane world. Keep us from projecting our own infantile feelings of inadequacy upon an already overburdened world; instead may we, with Thy help, face the world realistically, and conquer the evil that would defeat us.

May Thy spirit of love touch our hearts with tenderness - and so infuse us with thy tender mercy, that we may reflect it even imperfectly in the lives of others. May we ever be kind, for we never know what battles another is fighting. By our spirit of love, help us to defeat loneliness, fear. May we be more than conquerors. Make us valiant in prayer. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.