
Incapacitated by Sin!

By David Wilkerson

June 13, 1998 Incapacitated - what a frightening word! It means "deprived of capacity or power to perform; rendered unfit, useless; disqualified."

According to God's word, sin is the great incapacitator. It affects ministers and laymen alike - robbing them of all power and usefulness, leaving them dry and empty, and removing all ability to fulfill the eternal purposes of Christ.

When the prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of Christ and his kingdom, he outlined what Christ's true ministers would be like. In doing so, he defined our ministry in these last days. He said, in essence, "I want you to know the marks of the true people of God - those who'll be ministering just before the prince of peace comes to reign!"

Isaiah begins with these words: "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness..." (Isaiah 32:1). Then the prophet adds, "And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (verse 2).

Some Bible scholars believe that the "man" Isaiah is describing here is any believer who trusts in Christ. I disagree. No human being can possibly be all these things - a sheltering cover, a satisfier of the dry soul, a trustworthy shadow or protector, a "great rock." No matter how holy or deeply committed a believer is, he can't be all these things to all people at all times.

It's clear to me Isaiah is talking about Christ. And Isaiah goes on to tell us that a true servant of God will preach the all-sufficiency of Christ! Indeed, this believer shuts himself in with Jesus, trusting his Lord to make his soul a well-watered garden. He lives with a quiet confidence, his spirit at rest and full of peace. And he testifies: "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (Song of Solomon 2:3-4).

This true servant of God has no "tempest" brewing in his soul because of sin. On the contrary, he fully trusts the Holy Ghost to mortify his sins, and so his spirit is as free as a bird. He has no fears or worries, because all is clear between him and his Lord. And now there's a song in his heart - because Christ is his delight!

Moreover, this servant knows no one can harm him - because he clings to the security and comfort of God's promise to defend the righteous. No weapon formed against him can prosper - because God himself rises up against every tongue that comes against him. God is his defense in a weary land!

Now, Isaiah points out two distinguishing marks of the righteous servant. First, he has discernment - and second, he knows the voice of God distinctly: "The eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken" (Isaiah 32:3).

We see an example of this in Jesus' first encounter with Nathaniel. When Christ saw Nathaniel coming toward him, he cried: "...Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47). In other words: "Look, brothers - here comes a man who's no hypocrite. There's no deceit in him, no immorality. He's a clean vessel!"

Then Jesus turned to Nathaniel and said, "...verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven

open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (verse 51). The Greek phrasing here comes from a root meaning that suggests "repetitively." In other words, Jesus was telling Nathaniel, "God is going to open up to you continuing revelations. He'll reveal heaven to you repetitively!"

Likewise, beloved, God makes this covenant with every minister of the gospel whose life is above reproach, with no hidden sin or dark secrets. Such a servant receives a continuous flow of the revelation of Christ's glory. And he acts as an oracle of God - continually receiving a fresh word from heaven!

I'm often amazed by the fresh, anointed words I hear these days from a number of unknown young preachers. We receive scores of preaching tapes from all over the country, and occasionally a tape will contain such a message. When I hear this kind of pure vision of Christ, I sometimes call the minister who preached it and ask for more tapes.

If the man's tapes prove he's consistent in his vision and message - and I discern that heaven opens to him repetitively - I'm often moved to invite him to preach at Times Square Church. In fact, that's how we got our associate pastor, Carter Conlon.

Such servants are straightforward and simple in their walk with God, and their lives are open books. They're devoted to their wives and families. And they don't give even a hint of ambition. Instead, they happily pastor small congregations, spending many of their waking hours alone in prayer.

These men don't waste time on foolish games or pastimes. They don't fritter away the hours watching TV, surfing the internet or being hooked on sports. Their very presence is full of God's Spirit. And revelations of Christ flow out of them like rivers of life!

Our church is also staffed by godly elders. Often when I hear these men teach, I shake my head in awe, wondering, "Where did these servants get such incredible revelations of the glory, power and sufficiency of Christ? They have no theological training. Yet they're teaching pure, holy streams of revelation!"

Like Nathaniel, these are servants in whom there is no guile, no secret habit, no unforsaken sin. Therefore, they can see, hear and discern God's voice to them. They aren't deceived - and so they recognize their Lord's heartbeat clearly!

I've laid out to you Isaiah's description of godly last-days ministers. Now let's consider what Isaiah says about the incapacitated servant of God - the one who renders himself useless to Christ's flock because he harbors a besetting sin. Such a person is marked by these three characteristics:

1. A Loss of Discernment.

The incapacitated servant has his "spiritual eyes" dimmed. Although Isaiah was prophesying in this chapter about the good that comes to ministers when the Lord revives them, the men he addressed were still deaf and blind to the things of God.

Matthew tells us, "If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light

that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23). Scripture makes it plain: Hidden sins are "works of darkness." And we know from God's word that light has no communion with darkness. His light will not operate in the darkened chambers of unforsaken sin.

Peter tells us Christ "...preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient..." (1 Peter 3:19-20). It was disobedience that cast these souls into a prison of darkness. Likewise today, every willful act of disobedience causes the light of discernment within us to darken. Over time our perception of truth becomes distorted, and our "open heaven" grows clouded.

The Lord suffers greatly whenever hidden sin brings gross darkness upon our souls. And nothing grieves him more than when we resist and reject his warnings and convictions. Consider these tragic cases, as described in two letters we received:

* A Christian wife wrote, "My husband has given himself over completely to internet pornography. Now I've filed for divorce, and he doesn't even care.

"We were happily married for twenty-five years before all this happened. I couldn't understand why he spent so much time shut up in his room with his computer. Then one day I walked in - and I was shocked by the ugly filth I saw on the screen.

"He became obsessed. His personality changed, and a meanness came over him. I knew he was addicted. When I threatened to leave, he agreed to get rid of the computer. Yet that only lasted about three months. Then he brought another one home, saying, 'I can't help it. This time, the computer stays. I'm going to do as I please.'"

This woman says she filed for divorce because she no longer knows the man she married. He now walks in darkness - feeding his soul on the dregs of hell!

* A pastor's wife wrote, "My husband once worked with you, Brother David. He was such a good man, a true shepherd. He loved to teach, and he had great compassion on those trapped in sin. He ministered to alcoholics and addicts, taking in people from the streets. He was so kind and considerate.

"But then he began to flirt with pornography. Within months, I saw him change into another man. He became addicted, bringing home pornographic videos. One day he told me he would leave me if I didn't watch them with him. I did this reluctantly. But after two weeks, I realized I was being seduced by the videos. Immediately, I repented before God.

"Yet my husband went deeper and deeper into a gloomy darkness. Doubts about God's faithfulness flooded his mind, and he became disgusted with the ministry. All of his fruit dried up. At that point, he began to justify sin. His music tastes changed, as well as his choice of clothes. Everything was in disorder."

I remember this pastor as being a wonderful servant of the Lord. But today, after years of indulging his lust, he has divorced his wife and married a wicked woman - and he's deeply involved in the occult. Yet he justifies it all! As I think of him now, I recall Isaiah's warning: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

The apostle Paul makes a horrifying statement directed to those who walk "in the vanity of their mind" (Ephesians 4:17). Such people justify their sin, no longer seeking deliverance from it. Paul says of them: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (verse 18).

How did these become so dark and blinded? They fell under a judicial blindness that comes upon all who give themselves over to sin: "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (verse 19).

There's nothing more sad and pitiful than a minister who's been blinded by God - a man afraid to name sin because he clings to his own, who calls good evil and evil good, who's blinded to the times, who preaches nothing but a permissive grace.

John Owen, the Puritan writer, spells out the tragic result: "A man under the power of some predominant lust is under false security and does not discern coming perilous times, and he does not discharge his duty as a watchman."

2. Deafness to the Voice of God.

Isaiah faithfully prophesied to Israel that the "ears of them that hear" would one day be opened. But sadly, his listeners had shut their ears to God's voice. They wanted to hold onto their bosom sins!

"...when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed.

"Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name" (Isaiah 65:12-15).

How tragic it is to refuse to hear the loving warnings of the Holy Spirit. Whenever we shut our ears to God's command to mortify the sins of our flesh, we're doomed to experience every kind of sorrow and pain.

Please understand - I'm not talking about a servant of God who's overtaken by a sin he hates. Nor am I talking about the believer who won't allow himself any rest until the Holy Ghost sets him free. I heartily agree with John Owen, who wrote, "Never in the history of man has God turned away from a man surprised by sin, who cries against it night and day, who has made no peace with it."

Rather, I'm talking about the believer who has learned to love his sin - who has laid his head in the lap of a Delilah. Such a person has calloused his conscience. And so now, whenever he tries to speak God's word, he does so deceitfully.

I know many preachers who are like this. They cover the altar with their tears, crying and groaning - but they continue to cheat on their wives. God warns them, "I won't accept the tears of a hypocrite. First stop your adulterous treachery!" (see Malachi 2:15).

The servant who continues his sinful ways will indeed hear voices - but none of these voices will be God's. Instead, that person will be given over to delusion: "I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not" (Isaiah 66:4).

What an awful thing it is when God no longer speaks! Saul found himself in this sorrowful, terrifying condition. Here was a once gifted, Spirit-led man of God who had ended up totally cut off from God's voice. Scripture tells us that in Saul's last days, he "...was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams...nor by prophets" (1 Samuel 28:5-6).

Over the years, I've welcomed into my office evangelists who at one time were mightily used of God. You would probably know most of them by name. But when I met them in their later years, they were fallen men - eaten up by controlling lusts!

These men sat before me with blank expressions - empty shells with the word "Ichabod" written on their foreheads: "The glory of God has departed!" What had happened to them? They spent their later years lounging in front of television - and so they hadn't received a fresh word from God in years. They were unable to preach even an old message. And when they were with me, they couldn't even offer up a prayer.

Jeremiah says of such men: "But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction" (Jeremiah 17:23). "...they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words" (19:15).

3. Distortion of Truth.

Isaiah speaks of Christ healing the stammering tongue (see Isaiah 33:19). The Hebrew word for "stammer" in this passage means "a defective utterance." This is the voice of uncertainty and hesitation - one that speaks a word without power or any ring of truth.

Listen to the prophet's solemn words on this subject: "The vile person will speak villainy, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy..." (32:6). The Hebrew word for "villainy" here means "foolishness, a wicked crime." It comes from the word "nabal," which means "dolt, fool."

Isaiah is telling us, "Only a wicked, doltish man attempts to deliver God's word while indulging in sin. His words come out as utter foolishness!" Such a man commits "...utter error against the Lord, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail" (same verse). His own error ends up misleading others!

I grieve over the hundreds of letters we receive from Christians across this nation who say, "I get a knot in my stomach just thinking about going to church. My pastor's sermons are so shallow and unfulfilling. Nothing I hear challenges me or provokes me to holiness." Why is this so? It's because the word the pastor preaches isn't anointed truth!

I'm convinced that one particular sin, more than any other, causes such blatant distortion of truth. It is the sin of unbelief. And this sin is rampant in many ministries today.

God calls the sin of unbelief "going back to Egypt": "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help...but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!" (31:1). "Woe to the rebellious children...that take counsel, but not of me...that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth..." (30:1-2).

Isaiah was dumbfounded at seeing many of Israel's leaders mount their horses and gallop to Egypt to try to get counsel on national policy and security. These were the same men who told the prophet they had no time to seek the Lord or consult with him. But God didn't take their actions lightly. He called it all rebellion - and he pronounced woe upon them!

Today, nothing has changed. Multitudes of Christians crisscross the country attending seminars and conventions with a "Go to Egypt" mentality. They're networking, strategizing, borrowing worldly methods, getting flesh-inspired counsel. In short, they're looking for any new thing that might excite them.

But the praying servant who trusts God wholly knows he has no time for Egyptian concepts. The only place he runs to is his secret closet. And that's where he gets his counsel - on his knees!

Now Let Me Give You the Good News!

The Lord has given us a wonderful example of his power to revive and heal his blind and deaf servants. The example is found in the book of Haggai.

The Lord sent two men on a mission to rebuild the fallen temple in Jerusalem. These two men were Zerubbabel and the high priest, Joshua - two godly leaders who obeyed the Lord and carried out his work with zeal and faithfulness.

But at first they had to labor against heavy opposition. Groups of backslidden, idolatrous Jews and jealous Samaritans opposed the work, trying everything to prevent it. Finally, these groups succeeded in getting Cyrus to rule against the two men's mission. After that, Zerubbabel and Joshua grew weary of the struggle - of being opposed, slandered and misjudged. So, for the next sixteen years, the work of God stopped.

Yet Zerubbabel and Joshua never received a mandate from God to retire. The Bible doesn't record any edict from Cyrus actually revoking their permission to build. So their work shouldn't have missed a beat. The fact is, God still had all the power necessary to help them go forward.

Yet Cyrus' verbal warnings gave Zerubbabel and Joshua an excuse to break off their work. And soon they focused their energies on their own personal comfort. They thought only about providing for themselves - houses, lands, families, careers. That's when they broke off all sacrificial ministry. They thought they no longer had to bear a cross or to carry the burden of the Lord.

In such times, Satan always shows up providing a perverted theology to support a compromising lifestyle. The doctrine in this case was: "It's not God's time yet. The word from Cyrus has made that clear. The Lord will let us know when the time is right to build. Meanwhile, let's build up our estates. We need to enjoy our religion!"

Simply put, the people of Israel - including these two godly men - were guilty of blatant unbelief. They lost all their confidence in God to direct and support them!

I see the same spirit of unbelief at work today. Preachers have told me very bluntly, "I'm counting the days till I retire. I've had it with people! I don't want to put up with their stuff anymore. As soon as my retirement date comes, I'm out of here!"

No! May this never be the attitude of any true servant of God! The Holy Ghost is a quickening Spirit - and if you're living and ministering in the Spirit, then the older you get and the longer you minister, the stronger you'll grow through it all. The work of God ought to become more exciting to you with every passing year!

Yet Zerubbabel and Joshua grew increasingly deaf and blind. They'd become sin-disabled, incapacitated servants who looked after only their own interests. Without question, God was saddened and displeased with them. But he was not finished with these men!

Likewise, beloved, you may fit the description Isaiah gives of an incapacitated servant. You may be badgered by a besetting sin that won't loosen its grip on your life. But God sees your heart - and if you have even a sigh of mourning left in you, God can revive you and restore to you all that the cankerworm has eaten. He isn't through with you. In fact, your best days may be ahead!

If You Want to Be Revived, Restored and Delivered, God Will Send You a Final Warning - Wed to a Promise!

Thank God for the prophet Haggai. Here was a man of God living in victory - someone who had the mind of God, who walked in grace, and who had heaven open to him. He came on the scene and gave Zerubbabel and Joshua this warning: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this [God's] house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways" (Haggai 1:4-5).

This was a call to quit focusing on self - not only self-comfort, but also self-despair. Haggai was saying, "Forget the past! It's time to rise up out of your lethargy. In spite of all your sinning, God wants you to take up his work where you left off. Now, pick up your instruments of labor and regain your confidence in the Lord. Go back to your secret closet of prayer - back to trusting God to deliver you from your sin. Soon you'll hear his voice again!"

Scripture says, "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel...and the spirit of Joshua...and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God" (verse 14). Then God gave them this promise: "Consider now from this day and upward...from this day will I bless you" (2:18-19).

Zerubbabel and Joshua were once again walking in faith and righteousness. And now the prophet brought them the best word of all: God was going to take down the obstacle that nearly destroyed them! "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it" (Zechariah 4:7).

Dear saint, this is what your present trial is all about. God is going to stir your heart once again - and

you'll see the completion of your call! The Holy Spirit is going to destroy every stronghold in your life - not through your strength, but through his. Then you'll finish the course God has laid out before you. And, like Zechariah, you'll do it shouting, "Grace, grace! God has been merciful and faithful to me!"

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