

# CRY ALOUD; DO NOT HOLD BACK

## *A Meditation on Denouncing Sin from Isaiah 58:1*

Preachers used to have a reputation for denouncing sin. (Have you noticed that we don't even like to use the term *preacher* as much these days? I guess it sounds too harsh.) Such a reputation shouldn't be surprising in light of the fact that this is what God had called His messengers to do for millennia. And this railing against sin isn't supposed to be done softly, quietly or timidly in some out of the way corner. Isaiah was commanded by the LORD, "Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1).

In speaking out against the sins of Israel, Isaiah was to cry *aloud*. The prophet is also told to raise his voice like a *trumpet*. The trumpet was one of the louder instruments that Israel used in worship. It is certainly louder than say the flute or harp. Furthermore, a trumpet is often used throughout the Bible to get people's attention. Before the rapture and the second coming of Christ the trumpet of God will sound (1 Thess. 4:16). God wanted to make sure that even the hard-of-hearing in Israel wouldn't miss the message.

Nobody in their right mind enjoys denouncing sin. John the Baptist surely didn't take delight in having to rebuke King Herod for unlawfully taking Herodias as his wife. He wasn't naïve about the possible consequences of his actions. However, a prophet's first consideration is not the consequences of his actions; it's obedience to the commands of God. A prophet is not a politician. He doesn't stick his finger in the air to find out which way the democratic wind is blowing; rather a man who speaks for God sticks his finger in God's authoritative Word and boldly declares, "Thus saith the Lord..."

Admittedly, this is easier said than done. There is a good reason why God exhorted Isaiah, "do not hold back." He knew this would be the prophet's natural tendency, as it is for many "prophets." I know I need this reminder. In God's providence he has sent many saints my way who have encouraged me, "Don't hold back, pastor. Give us the whole truth. We need to hear it." Thank God that many sheep yearn for more than to have their ears itched each Lord's Day.

The truth is many pastors are timid like Timothy and need to be reminded not to "be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord..., but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:8-9). At first, it seems incredible that a minister of the gospel would have to be admonished not to be ashamed of the testimony about his Lord, who suffered and died to secure his salvation. This seems incredible, until we honestly consider our own fragile frame. We are but dust, and this dust is hesitant at times to boldly proclaim the whole counsel of God.

While Paul stated that he was not ashamed of the gospel (2 Tim. 1:12; Rom. 1:16), he, nevertheless, asked for prayer that he would "*boldly...proclaim the mystery of the gospel*" (Eph. 6:19). And on the heels of that request came another that he "*may declare it boldly*" (vs. 20). Why this repeated request for prayer to be bold? It should be obvious: Even the great apostle Paul could succumb to fear and not preach as boldly as he ought to. Let's never forget that the best of men are men at best, and need the prayers of God's people to not hold back and blow the trumpet.

Isaiah is told to point out the sins of his people. But no vague "You need to be a little more holy" will suffice. Isaiah is to be specific. Basically Isaiah said, "Your fasting is hypocritical, because it doesn't include letting go of wickedness, sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into your house and clothing the naked" (Isa. 58:6-7). Every pastor needs to ask himself, "What are the sins my congregation struggles with?" and preach against those. It doesn't do any good to preach against the sins that another congregation struggles with. And if he doesn't preach against the sins he sees in his own congregation he is not being a faithful minister of the gospel.

Martin Luther understood well: "If I profess, with the loudest voice and clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle field besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point." This meant Luther had to confront a false doctrine of salvation and a corrupt church. May God grant us discernment to detect the errors of our day, and then the boldness to lift our voices like a trumpet against them. By Wayne Christensen/Fox Lake Community Church/ See "**Permissions**" for reproduction authorization.

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 1,000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Fox Lake Community Church.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:**

By Wayne Christensen/Fox Lake Community Church.

Website: [www.foxlakechurch.org](http://www.foxlakechurch.org) Email: [wchristensen@foxlakechurch.org](mailto:wchristensen@foxlakechurch.org) 847-587-1331