

“Called to Serve”

Isaiah 6:1-13

Sunday, July 31st, 2022

On the way home after Sunday worship a father complained to his family about the church service. The music was too loud. The sermon was too long. The pews were too hard.

The man's son, observing this, spoke up from the back seat, "Dad, I thought it was a pretty good show for a dollar!"

Worship is what takes place when God's people draw near to Him. As we sinful people draw near to God in worship, we see more clearly how unworthy we are to be in His loving presence.

In the passage of Scripture before us this morning - **Isaiah 6:1-13** - we will see the prophet Isaiah's worshipful response to being in God's loving presence. This is one of the most well known and most important chapters in all of Isaiah's book - second only in my estimation to **Isaiah Chapter 53**. It was just 15 months ago (April 2021) when I last preached this text during a short series of OT texts I'd never before preached.

Senior Research Fellow Barry G. Webb writing in the *Bible Speaks Today* series of commentaries notes, "Chapter 6 towers like a majestic peak over the surrounding terrain and is clearly of central importance for the message of the book." (Webb, 58)

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.”

I’ve outlined this message as follows:

- **1 - When did this take place?**
- **2 - Who was involved?**
- **3 - What took place?**
- **4 - Where was Isaiah to go?**
- **5 - How long would that be the case?**

1 - When did the events in this chapter take place? Verse 1 helps us here - “In the year that King Uzziah died,” **2 Chronicles Chapter 26** tells us that Uzziah was 16 years of age when he became King of Judah. Further, he served as king for 52 years! Historical records indicate that Uzziah (also known as Azariah) died in 740 BC.

Why did Isaiah focus on Uzziah’s death, when most kings are listed in the Bible according to their births? Ray Ortlund, Jr., notes, “Uzziah’s death marked the end of an era. It was like our own world in 1914. After decades of prosperity, Europe was free-falling into World War I, the far-ranging disaster of the 20th century. Edward, Viscount of Falloden, saw the significance of it: ‘The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.’ It was at just such a defining moment that Isaiah was called into the ministry...” in the year that King Uzziah died.” (Ortlund, 76)

2 - Who was involved in the events depicted in this chapter? The second half of verse 1 and all of verse 2 answer this question. “...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.”

- The pronoun “I” refers to Isaiah. He is the one who “saw” the Lord.
- “The Lord” is God.
- “Seraphim” (burning ones) were also present. They are celestial, angelic beings who guarded access to the throne in this heavenly temple. These seraphim had six wings each.

Going back to what Isaiah saw in verse 1. It cannot mean that Isaiah saw God without being protected against His white hot holiness. Speaking to Moses, God's words are recorded in **Exodus 33:20** - "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." Jesus said a similar thing which is recorded in **John 1:18** - "No one has seen God at any time." The vision Isaiah saw of God was a theophany (An appearance of God to the human mind), because God is invisible. What captures Isaiah most is the Lord's robe and its train.

3 - What took place? Two seraphs spoke with each other in the hearing of Isaiah. One of them proclaimed, "Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord of hosts; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!" Holy! Holy! Holy! isn't just repetition; it's emphasis. It isn't 1+1+1; it's perfection x perfection x perfection. His holiness is simply His God-ness in all His attributes. God is not like us, only bigger and stronger. He is in a different category altogether. He is holy!

Verses 4 and 5 record the reaction of the temple to this proclamation of the seraphim, and Isaiah's response to it. "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.'"

It must've felt like an earthquake was taking place as the posts of the temple door shook and the temple was filled with smoke (the presence of the Lord, who led God's people during the daylight). God was in the house!

Verse 5 here is the first time that Isaiah speaks in this book. "Woe" is great sorrow or distress. Isaiah's thought is that his sin was exposed. He had become undone (ruined). Twice, Isaiah mentions lips - his lips and the lips of the people. They all had to be cleansed to remain in God's good favor.

And cleansing is what happened next in verses 6 and 7. One of the seraphim (literally 'burning one') flew to Isaiah with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 He touched Isaiah's lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven."

Isaiah was cleansed and purified for the ministry God had in mind for him.

4 - Where was Isaiah to go?

Now God speaks for the first time in this chapter in verse 8. He said ... "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?"

I (Isaiah) said, "Here I am. Send me."

God's charge for Isaiah was to preach to the people of Judah and her capital city, Jerusalem. Largely, these so-called people of God were spiritually dead; they had not

been brought to spiritual life by God the Holy Spirit. Isaiah was going to them with the gospel message on his lips.

One of two things will happen when God's Word is faithfully preached, taught, and testified to - it will either harden people preventing them from seeing Christ and their need for a Savior, or it will open the hearts of those who are softened to the gospel. God is telling Isaiah his preaching would harden those to whom he preached. That's what we see in verses 9 and 10 - "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' 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."

Those words of judgment are included in each of the first 5 books of the New Testament (**Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39-41; and Acts 28:25-27**).

5 - How long would that be the case? In verse 11, Isaiah asks the Lord, "*How long? Meaning how long must I continue to preach to people who aren't interested?*" God's answer is in verses 11 & 12 - Until and through the time when the land is ruined and the people are taken captive and even what's left gets wiped out again. As time would tell, In less than 20 years, the northern kingdom's capital, Samaria, fell to the Assyrians. It would be more than 100 years until the southern kingdom was sacked.

In the midst of promised destruction, God preserved a remnant - another of His mercies. That's verse 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."

God always leaves a remnant of His people. We may seem to be alone in our grief, misery, or suffering. But, God will never leave you, nor forsake you. Often times, God sends someone to you at just the right time, often another believer in Christ or a member of your church.

One thought before we summarize: As long as we think there is some hope of a human solution to our problems, there is little chance of our genuinely seeing God.

This text has shown us that Isaiah was a man with a big vision of God, a deep awareness of his own sinfulness, a profound experience of the grace of God, and a willingness to spend and be spent in His service, whatever the cost. May God help us to be more like him. (Webb, 61)

Summary:

- **1 - When did this take place?** A very long time ago. The year that King Uzziah died, which was 740 years before the birth of Christ.

- **2 - Who was involved?** Isaiah, the Lord God, and seraphim.
- **3 - What took place?** One seraph said to another, “Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord of hosts; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!” And the door posts of the temple shook, the temple filled with smoke, and Isaiah came face-to-face with his sin in light of God’s holiness. A seraph would take a hot coal and touch Isaiah’s lips as a sign that he was purified morally.
- **4 - Where was Isaiah to go?** To Judah and Jerusalem. Places filled with people who presumed they were God’s people. Instead, they were selfish, self-centered, pathetic kingdoms of one with no room for others in their lives.
- **5 - How long would that be the case?** Until and through the time when the land was ruined and the people were taken captive. As time would soon tell, In less than 20 years, the northern kingdom Israel’s capital, Samaria, fell to the Assyrians. It would be more than 100 years until the southern kingdom of Judah and her capital Jerusalem were sacked.

God is calling you to serve - it could be in Bible Bunch, singing with the choir, playing an instrument with the orchestra, playing the piano on occasion, serving in the nursery, or even establishing new ministries!

In the forests of northern Europe and Asia lives a little animal called the ermine, known for his snow-white fur in winter. He instinctively protects his white coat against anything that would soil it. Fur hunters take advantage of this unusual trait of the ermine. They don’t set a snare to catch him, but instead they find his home, which is usually a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree. They smear the entrance and interior with grime. Then the hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward home, but doesn’t enter because of the filth. Rather than soil his white coat, he is trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving his purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life.