

Isaiah 6

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1 It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple.

2 Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.

3 They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!"

4 Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke.

5 Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies."

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.

7 He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven."

8 Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me."

9 And he said, "Yes, go, and say to this people, 'Listen carefully, but do not understand. Watch closely, but learn nothing.'

10 Harden the hearts of these people. Plug their ears and shut their eyes. That way, they will not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts and turn to me for healing."

11 Then I said, "Lord, how long will this go on?" And he replied, "Until their towns are empty, their houses are deserted, and the whole country is a wasteland;

12 until the Lord has sent everyone away, and the entire land of Israel lies deserted.

13 If even a tenth—a remnant—survive, it will be invaded again and burned. But as a terebinth or oak tree leaves a stump when it is cut down, so Israel's stump will be a holy seed."

Introduction

Uzziah (or Azariah) became king of Judah at 16 and reigned as king for 52 years. He replaced Amaziah as king of Judah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord even if not wholeheartedly. The years of his reign were the most prosperous excepting that of Jehosaphat since the time of Solomon. Things went well for Uzziah up until his pride got the better of him and tried to burn incense to the Lord and was struck down with leprosy. Jotham his son took over as regent until King Uzziah died in approximately 740 BC.

Isaiah comes into the picture at the time that Assyria was back on the move conquering lands with Egypt being its ultimate destination. Both Israel and Judah stood in the way of this goal so both of them were invaded by Assyria. It was in this context that Isaiah was commissioned to try and convince the people of Judah that their hope lay in God, not in other kings. Hezekiah was the only one that heeded Isaiah's warnings and Judah was rescued from the Assyrian invasion in 701 BC. Israel fell to the Assyrian's in 722 BC.

The Vision

The vision itself is covered in just four verses. Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne high and exalted and the train of his robe filled the temple. Seraphim attended him and they were calling to one another and the sound of their voices shook the temple to its foundations and the entire



building was filled with smoke. In this day of age much of this vision loses its power as the imagery is not what we are used to but still we get a sense of the majesty and awe in the vision. God is God. He is King – He sits on a throne, a throne of glory before which we must worship, a throne of government under which we must be subject and a throne of grace to which we can come boldly. He is not a politician or some petty tyrant. He is God. Creator of the Universe. The King and the Lord of Heaven's Armies. The one to whom everyone and everything belongs whether they acknowledge it or not.

The temple to the people of Israel was the place where God lived. In New Testament times we often see the Temple as the church in the world and it is his train that fills that Temple. God is everywhere, there is no place that he is not. And He is working out his plans, both in the church and in the world.

Above the throne the seraphim stand, his instruments. And they sing God's praise – Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Heaven's Armies. The whole earth is full of his glory. Even though this world is corrupted by sin it still sings of God's glory. As Paul tells us in Romans:

20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. (Romans 1:20)

And their voices shook the foundations of the Temple and it was filled with smoke. When Solomon dedicated the first temple we are told in 1 Kings 8:10 and 11:

10 When the priests came out of the Holy Place, a thick cloud filled the Temple of the Lord. 11 The priests could not continue their service because of the cloud, for the glorious presence of the Lord filled the Temple. (1 Kings 8:10-11)

In after Moses had built the Ark of the Covenant we see the same thing:

34 Then the cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. 35 Moses could no longer enter the Tabernacle because the cloud had settled down over it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. (Exodus 40:34-35)

When God comes in power the normal takes second place.

Isaiah's Response

Isaiah's response is typical of those who have seen a vision of God in his glory. We see the same response in Moses, Fear and awareness of the sinfulness of himself and of those he lives among. When the angels came to Elizabeth, Mary and Zechariah the first thing they said was do not be afraid. Perfect love drives out fear as John tells us but in this world we do not love perfectly. (1 John 4:18) but John also says that the person who says they have not sinned deceives themselves and the truth is not in them (1 John 1: 8). We should never treat God like some benevolent grandfather in the sky who will just forgive us because we ask even though we don't really mean it. Israel thought they could go through the motions of religion and the sacrificial system and God got really angry with them over it. (Psalm 51:16, Hosea 6:6). A humble and contrite heart is what God looks for. A people who are interested in justice and mercy, not just going through the motions. Complacency is one of the issues the people of Israel faced and it's true for us too.

The Commission



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This is the most common use of this passage and verse 8 is normally where most people stop reading. We normally assume this was Isaiah's commissioning but there is actually no explicit mention of this. It may or may not have been. It may be that he was a prophet before this time but I think we can certainly say that it was a significant point in Isaiah's life. One of the seraphim take a coal from the altar and touches his lips with it and tells Isaiah that the coal is symbolic – that his guilt has been taken away and he atoned for. And then Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord – Whom shall I send and who will go for us? And Isaiah replies – Here I am. Send me.

The Message

What was the message Isaiah was commissioned to give. One of joy and good news? Not exactly. Rather it was a message to tell the people that God that they would hear but not understand, that they would see, but not perceive.

But what I think makes this passage particularly important is the fact that it is quoted six times in the New Testament. It is quoted by Jesus and recorded in all four of the gospels and is his response to the question of why he always talks to the people in parables. Remember – these were his people – his chosen people in fact. Jesus was not just talking to the religious leaders, he was talking to the common people, the you and I of that day.

10 His disciples came and asked him, "Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?"

11 He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not.

12 To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.

13 That is why I use these parables, For they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand.

14 This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend.

15 For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes - so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand,

and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.'

16 "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.

17 I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. (Matthew 13:10-17)

10 Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant.

11 He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders,

12 so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'When they see what I do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not understand. Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven.'" (Mark 4:10-12)

9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant.

10 He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables to teach the others so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'When they look, they won't really see. When they hear, they won't understand.'" (Luke 8:9-10)



37 But despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him.

38 This is exactly what Isaiah the prophet had predicted: “Lord, who has believed our message? To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful arm?”

39 But the people couldn't believe, for as Isaiah also said,

40 “The Lord has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts - so that their eyes cannot see, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and have me heal them.”

41 Isaiah was referring to Jesus when he said this, because he saw the future and spoke of the Messiah's glory. (John 12:37-41)

It is quoted by Paul in Acts when he is in Rome and is talking to the local Jewish authorities.

25 And after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul: “The Holy Spirit was right when he said to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet,

26 ‘Go and say to this people: When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend.

27 For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes - so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’

28 So I want you to know that this salvation from God has also been offered to the Gentiles, and they will accept it.” (Acts 28:25-28)

And again in Romans when discussing the plight of the Jews.

8 As the Scriptures say, “God has put them into a deep sleep. To this day he has shut their eyes so they do not see, and closed their ears so they do not hear.” (Romans 11:8)

Isaiah's immediate question was – How long Lord? He was concerned for the people he was called to preach to. I don't know if he was thinking about what it meant for him at that stage but essentially God was saying to him that he was going to preach but people would not listen. Here he was, a prophet, a preacher who of all the Old Testament prophets would tell us the most about Jesus, yet is being told basically that his ministry would be a failure. Yes Isaiah, you will preach, but the people will not hear. Not exactly the sort of message that would make you want to continue in your chosen line of work. This may have been part of the reason he asked the question how long, we do not know. The Lord's answer to him was not exactly encouraging. *Until their towns are empty, their houses are deserted, and the whole country is a wasteland; 12 until the Lord has sent everyone away, and the entire land of Israel lies deserted.* Less than a tenth of the population will survive – if they do it will be invaded again and the land burnt. But, says the Lord, even as when the oak and the terebinth trees are cut down, the stump that remains will re-shoot and that shoot will be the holy seed. There is hope, but it is not going to happen quickly or in the short term.

And Us?

So why do I think this is important. Because in all these cases the people being addressed were those who considered themselves religious, who considered themselves, if not perfect, at least in the right camp. They were religious, they went through the right motions. OK. They weren't as good as the Pharisees or the Sadducees but they were OK.

So, the question we need to ask ourselves when we read a passage like this is – are we closer to Isaiah or to those who will not listen? We see this same theme repeated in the letter to Laodicea in Revelation.



14 *“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation:*

15 *“I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other!*

16 *But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!*

17 *You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.*

18 *So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see.*

19 *I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.*

20 *“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.*

21 *Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.*

22 *“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.” (Revelation 3:14-22)*

Verse 20 is normally used in the context of non-Christians but that is actually not the case. He is writing to the CHURCH at Laodicea, to those who had presumably been converted but had become complacent. This is NOT to say that I think we have become complacent. But I think it is good for us to sit back and reflect on where we are at every now and again. It is so easy to get caught up in the rut of life and not sit back and reflect where we are. So the questions I want to leave you with are:

1. Are we or are we becoming complacent in our walk with God? This includes:
2. Are we growing in our own walk with God? Does anything need to change to improve that part of our life?
3. As a church, as a people of God, do you think God would look with favour upon us? Is so why and if not, why not? What needs to stay the same, what needs to change? In terms of Bill Hybels video – what wrecks us as people? The marks of the church traditionally have been defined as
 1. The pure preaching of the Word.
 2. The proper celebration of the sacraments.
 3. The faithful exercise of church discipline.These were defined when the community aspects of life in general and church life were taken as a given so were never explicitly mentioned.
3. In the previous weeks Men of Integrity readings one the questions that was asked was: Around what or whom are you seeking to structure your life?

