

Trinity
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Standing before the Holy Triune God, we say...
1. I'm ruined! 2. I'm released! 3. I'm ready!

Pastor Michael Ewart
Acts 6:1-8

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We've all heard of life changing events happening in people's lives. A person has a brush with death. Another takes a trip overseas and sees how some live in abject poverty. Another finds himself in the "wrong place at the wrong time." Another is in the "right place at the right time." Their life is changed. We listen to these stories with interest... they're on all the talk shows. And perhaps we sometimes listen with envy. These are people whose lives have been changed in a meaningful way. The rest of continue on in our unchanged lives... perhaps feeling we are in a rut. Perhaps feeling we lack the power to change.

In our Old Testament lesson today, we hear yet another story of a man who went through a life changing event. It was the prophet Isaiah, and the event that changed his life was a vision in which he stood before the holy Triune God almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

This event or experience that changed Isaiah's life can change our lives too. Perhaps none of us have seen a vision of heaven like Isaiah did. Nevertheless, what was true of Isaiah, is true of us. Like him, we also stand before the Holy Triune God. And with Isaiah, we come to a life-changing realization: The power for change in our life is not in us. It is in God. The purpose in our life is not directed toward ourselves, but toward God. Let's look through Isaiah's eyes and live the experience with him. It will change your life forever.

Isaiah 6:1-8 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Real change in our lives will only occur when we stand face to face with almighty, holy God, creator of the universe, just as Isaiah did.

First, a little background. Isaiah was prophet... one of the greatest prophets of Israel. Isaiah spoke both to the common people of Israel and was an advisor to kings as well. He was a prophet during the reigns of four kings. It was a time of crisis, chaos, and moral decadence. God's people were turning their backs on the living God. When Isaiah served, the people of Israel were divided into two kingdoms. Isaiah witnessed the fall of the northern kingdom, and its people taken into captivity. He also saw the southern kingdom, Judah, under attack by Assyria.

Isaiah saw his vision in the year King Uzziah died. Uzziah reigned for 52 years, and he wasn't a terrible king. Which, if you study the kings of Israel, to be called a king who wasn't terrible is

actually a high complement. He fortified Jerusalem and built up its defenses which brought peace. He also developed agriculture and commerce which brought prosperity. Not a terrible king. But spiritually speaking, Uzziah was a failure. Instead of giving glory to God for his many accomplishments, he gave credit to himself. Because of his pride-filled heart God gave him leprosy... a skin disease he eventually died from.

After Uzziah's death, a wave of fear came over the country. What would happen now that their king had died? To make matters worse, a powerful Assyrian empire was growing in the east. Alliances were being formed. War was in the air.

What's worse, in all this uncertainty, the people didn't turn back to God for his help. Instead, they developed a fatalistic attitude. "Everything is uncertain! We could die tomorrow. So, let's eat and drink and party, for tomorrow we may die!" Sin and disobedience continued to increase. Idolatry and worship of false gods was also on the rise. Now imagine in all this, you are a prophet of the one true God. You see your country heading in a downward spiral on all fronts: politically, morally, spiritually. To give Isaiah strength and direction, God sent a life-changing event into Isaiah's life. He showed him a vision of His glory.

APPL: Friends, do you see any common themes between those times and our times? Are you concerned about the direction our country is heading? Do you see the morals of our society slipping more and more with each year that passes? Have you noticed the lack of people turning to the true God for help, and a general emptying of our churches? On a more personal note... are you disturbed by what you see in your own life? Do you find yourself making the same mistakes and sins over and over again even though you know better? Have you noticed your dedication to God and Christ's church slipping? ... Friends, do you need a life-changing event today?

Let's join Isaiah and see what he saw. He says, "*I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.*" It's only natural that God would show himself in the temple. In Psa 26:8 David writes, "*I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells.*" The temple was always associated with God's presence. God is high and exalted in this temple and just the train of his robe filled the whole temple. How much less could that temple truly contain God's essence and being.

"*Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.*" God had some heavenly attendants with him -- some angels. Here they are called seraphs, which literally means, "Burning ones." Perhaps they were called this to signify their purity. However, even these pure angelic beings showed their humility before the almighty God. We typically envision angels with two wings, but these had six wings... three sets. They covered their face with one set of wings out of reverence and awe. They covered their feet with another set, perhaps to show their humility and unworthiness, and with the other set of wings, they flew, ready to carry out God's commands.

And what were they doing? "*They were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'*" The continuous occupation of these angels was to praise God. They declare God, the absolute, independent, changeless God, holy. That is, set apart from all sin and impurity. They acknowledge that the whole earth is full of God's glory. God cannot be contained in a temple or even in all the earth. His glory is everywhere.

Isaiah goes on, "*At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*" Last summer I had the privilege of attending a worship conference in Minnesota. Over 1,000 musicians gathered. The worship services were amazing. There were a couple songs the give me chills even today when I remember them. We sang praises to God

accompanied by a full orchestra, a 60 member choir, a massive pipe organ, and 1,000 beautiful voices singing loud praises to our God, uniting in a single loud sound of praise and glory going up to our God. The hair on my neck stood up and my eyes were welled up with tears. Now imagine what Isaiah heard. In God's immediate presence, perfect, holy angels sang praises to God. Heaven was being rocked with their unrestrained praise.

And the whole temple area was filled with smoke. Smoke often indicated the presence of God. Through all of this vision, Isaiah is reminded that he is in the presence of the almighty, holy Creator of the universe. Isaiah is there! And friends, today, we are too. Through the eyes of Isaiah, we stand in the immediate presence of almighty, holy, Triune God, creator of heaven and earth. This is the life-changing event.

Now, standing before God, what is our response? What was Isaiah's response? It may surprise you. Not warmth and a feeling of being loved and peace. Isaiah is filled with terror. He says, *"Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."* Isaiah's reaction? Isaiah figured he was a dead man. He thought that for three reasons. *First*, he saw with total clarity the fact that he was a sinful man. *Second*, he saw with total clarity the fact that everyone in the world was also sinful. And *finally*, he saw with total clarity that he was standing in front of a perfect, all powerful being who hated sin. You can usually fool yourself and lie to yourself and try to convince yourself that you're not too bad of a person. And people often do that, don't they? Some rationalize their sinfulness by saying they're not that bad. Others insist that they try their hardest. They make an effort to do what's right. Others find comfort in the fact that they aren't as bad as some people. But those are all false rationalizations that don't stand up when you come to face to face with the almighty, holy God. Friends, I hope Isaiah's vision also becomes emblazoned in your own mind, because then we too will drop our false rationalizations. We'll realize there is no hiding from the all powerful, all knowing, all holy God. We all stand bare before our holy God with the sobering conclusion, *"I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

When Isaiah saw his vision of God, he not only became aware that God was infinitely greater and more powerful than he, he also became aware of the fact that God had every reason in the world to squash him dead. He was a sinful human being standing in front of a holy God who demands perfection and holiness.

Can you imagine if Isaiah's vision had ended there. He feels the terror, than suddenly he wakes up from the vision and that's it. That would have been a life-changing event. He would have lived out the rest of his days in dread and terror. Thank God Isaiah's vision didn't end there. Certainly what we've looked at so far is an awesome show of God's glory. And that look at God's glory caused Isaiah (and us) to fall prostrate before God in utter humility. However, what good is a prostrate prophet? God wasn't done showing his glory. So far Isaiah only got part of the picture. God had more to show him. He has more to show us too. Standing in terror, here's what happened next: *"Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'"*

The picture of forgiveness we have here is unique. One of the angels goes over to the altar with a pair of tongs and picks up a hot coal. Since the coal is hot, apparently a sacrifice had been made on that altar. The angel flies over to Isaiah, and touches the burning coal on his lips. And remember, burning was a symbol of purification. Then the seraph attaches meaning to his actions.

He reassures Isaiah that his guilt has been taken away and his sins atoned for. And I think the exact words he used are vitally important. He doesn't tell Isaiah that he was no longer a sinner or that his sins had disappeared. Rather, the guilt of his sins was taken away. Literally, his guilt was turned aside. It was no longer an obstacle between him and God. And he says how this has happened. His sins were atoned for. The necessary sacrifice had been made because of which there was forgiveness. Someone else paid the price for the sins he had committed. As a result, Isaiah stood before the all-holy God cleansed of sin and holy in his sight.

3,000 years later we have the blessing of knowing exactly how our sins were atoned for and who did it. Isaiah looked forward in faith to the One who would come to take away the sin of the world. We look back in faith to the One who came to take away the sin of the world. The way it happened was through Jesus Christ. The pure and holy Son of God was born a human being. As a human, Christ continued to be pure and holy. He always pleased the holy Father. If Jesus had the same vision Isaiah did, he would not have been filled with terror. He wouldn't have said, "*Woe to me! I am ruined!*" Jesus was a man of clean lips. There was no fault in him. But Isaiah also saw how Jesus would atone for people's sins, because he later wrote, "*The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*" In order for our sins to be atoned for, and so our guilt could be set aside, the holy Father laid all of our sins on Jesus. Then, carrying the world's sins on him, Jesus paid the penalty for sin. The Father punished Jesus. He punished him instead of you and instead of me. Therefore in Christ we have the righteousness the holy God demands of us. He made us holy in his sight. He won't destroy us because of Christ's atoning work.

Isaiah first says, "I'm ruined!" Now he says, "I'm released!" Sins are forgiven. And we say it too. Now look at Isaiah's reaction to God's gift. Isaiah writes, "*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I, send me!'*" Isaiah felt the tremendous burden of sin lifted from his shoulders. He's no longer the prostrate prophet, but the zealous and eager prophet. Isaiah wasn't a reluctant volunteer. Often times we have sign up sheets here at church for various things, and sometimes you see people grudgingly sign up, maybe after a little prodding from the pastor or another member. But that's not the kind of volunteer Isaiah was. It's not like he looked around the temple in his vision, and seeing no one else, say, "Well, I guess I'll go." Quite the opposite is true. When he saw God's glory in the forgiveness he had been given, you can almost picture him jumping up and down with his hand raised. "Look, over here! Here am I, available for service! Please, send me!"

Friends, we now have seen God's glory just as Isaiah did. Will our reaction be any different? You've stood in God's holy presence. You have seen his glory. Filled with terror, we say "I'm ruined!" But then we see his glory more fully revealed. Our unclean lips have been touched with the burning coal of purification. Christ lived for us. Christ died for us. Christ rose. We are clean. This unconditional, undeserved love for me, a sinner, sure shows me even more his incredible glory.

Now hear God say to you: "*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*" With Isaiah, answer, "Here am I! Send me!" Joyfully serve the Lord and serve others. God is sending you to your next door neighbor. To your co-worker. To your family member. Let the glory of God change your life and let it reorder your priorities. Serve him. Tell about him. Generously support the work we do together for God here at Good Shepherd, and generously support the work we do together as a Synod. There is plenty to do for God's kingdom. Having gotten a glimpse of his glory, let us eagerly respond, "Here am I! Send me! Send me!" Amen.