

## Written Copy: Isaiah 6:8-12 “Isaiah’s Call and Ours”

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ the Pentecost

Sunday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### Text: Isaiah 6:8-12

<sup>8</sup> And 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." <sup>9</sup> And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive." <sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." <sup>11</sup> Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, <sup>12</sup> and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

### Exegetical Statement

The LORD appears to Isaiah in a manifestation of His holiness with a vision that begins in the temple on earth and stretches up into the heavenly reality that the earthly temple represents. Faced with the LORD’s holiness Isaiah confesses who He is before the holy God, a sinner. But a seraphim, a fiery angel brings a live coal from the altar of incense as the answer to Isaiah’s prayer of confession, announcing to him the gracious and merciful words, “your guilt is taken away, your sin is atoned for.” These gracious words of forgiveness prompt Isaiah to answer the call to prophetic ministry. The LORD sends him to a people who, by and large will ignore and refuse his law and gospel message until it is too late and they are sent into exile because of their unfaithfulness and continued hard heartedness. But the LORD promises that a stump would be left from which a seed would spring up, looking forward in hope to the shoot from Jesse’s stump, the Messiah, who would be Christ Jesus our Lord.

### Focus Statement:

Many will refuse to believe the message not because of our abilities but because of their hardened heart. It is the Holy Spirit that brings people to faith. We are just the messengers. We were called into Gospel ministry in baptism where the LORD said to us: “your guilt is taken away, your sin is atoned for. This is the message we preach: the grace all can have through faith in Christ. It comes to us through baptism. And it is God’s message to us when we fail to share the Gospel with those He makes divine appointments with us.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it’s important to know:

When we try to witness our faith in Christ it can be so very disappointing to have our loved ones and friends turn away and disregard our heartfelt witness. We can feel embarrassed or take their rejection so to heart that we refuse to try again with them or others.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Be willing to share our faith like Isaiah, even when the result is hardened hearts and dull ears. We know that the Spirit can work miracles in the lives of others long after our witness. We are to be the faithful mouthpiece that Isaiah was.

## Introduction

Have you ever been witnessing your faith to someone else, especially someone you are close to, only by all outward appearances it's falling on deaf ears? And you wonder just what it would take for them to understand the truth of your faith the way that you do?

When I've preached at funerals, especially those I've done in funeral homes, where the unchurched crowd far outweighs the churched, I've wondered just what it would take to reach some people. Since I don't preach from a manuscript I can make a lot of eye contact, as well as see those who refuse to make eye contact, who are engaged in their own private discourse with their neighbor, or who are looking around the room, looking at their watch, looking at the guy who has just got up to use the bathroom or perhaps go smoke a cigarette outside. I want to reach them, to try to bring them back in. I speak louder, quieter, use pauses and inflections. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. One of the most aggravating times like this happened yesterday at a funeral I did at Schwartz Funeral home. At the most inappropriate time, in fact when I was quoting Revelation 21:8 about the eternal destination of all who die without faith, which is the eternal lake of fire, I see two young women giggling with one another like two young schoolgirls acting up in class.

When people seem to ignore our heartfelt witness to our faith in Jesus Christ, it makes us wonder just what it would take. I've wondered what would happen if Jesus was to suddenly appear in all His glory before them. Would that make them sit up and pay attention? Would they then begin to understand the seriousness, the awesomeness, the fearful reverence, and the joy of God's Word that you and I have been given to share? We have before us this morning the description of what happened when God Himself made an appearance to this man called Isaiah.

## Isaiah's Vision and Call

**Isaiah 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.**

Isaiah gives us a date when this vision happened, in the year King Uzziah, king of Judah and Jerusalem died. But he is doing more than giving us a date, he is referencing the passing of a king who started out to be a good and godly king, who ended up falling away. He died after a prolonged illness, a skin disease which was inflicted by the LORD when Uzziah entered the temple to burn incense, a task only the priests were allowed to do. He had become arrogant before the LORD, and paid for that arrogance by living in quarantine, no longer able to worship in the temple, no longer able to rule his people, until he succumbed to that disease. This was the turning point for Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel, which had up to this point been blessed with economic wealth and expansion. But they, like their king, had become arrogant, and their future would take a gradual turn for the worse.

Isaiah sees sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, the Lord. We can only assume that He is seeing the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, to whom the task of physical manifestations seems to be given. The bottom hem of his robe fills the temple, just the bottom hem. The rest of His appearance stretches up toward heaven. And for that matter, what Isaiah sees is a vision that starts in the earthly temple and stretches across time, space, and reality to that which the earthly temple is only a shadow, the presence of the LORD God of angelic armies ruling on His throne over all things.

**Isaiah 6:2-3 <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"**

The “seraphim” are angelic creatures that are in attendance with this manifestation of God. The word from which their name comes, “seraph” denotes a fiery being. These are not cute little cherub angels. These are glowing and imposing beings who are without sin. Yet even they demonstrate an unworthiness to be in the presence of this manifestation of God Almighty. They use their wings to hide their bodies from this presence of the LORD, and they hide their faces so that they might not look upon His countenance. If these holy and sinless creatures deem it necessary to hide themselves from the holiness of the LORD, how much more should we?

They are engaged in worship, calling out to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts (of the angelic armies). His glory fills all creation. Note the three times repeated “holy, holy, holy”, because our God is One God, yet Triune in nature. We too in our worship today sang this message of the praise of angels. We did with our opening hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy”, and we will repeat it again during our celebration of the LORD’s Supper. Both of these occurrences remind us that when we gather in the Divine service we gather in our Almighty Holy God’s real presence.

**Isaiah 6:5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for 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!"**

How does Isaiah react to seeing this astounding vision? He reacts the same way you and I do when we begin our worship in the Triune God’s real yet cloaked presence, he confesses his sinfulness. He mentions the sin of unclean lips, or the sin of speaking words that do the opposite of worship and praise the LORD and give witness to His love and faith. But the sin that comes out of our lips has its origin in a sinful heart. Without yet realizing it Isaiah is confessing his absolute unworthiness and unfitness to be the prophetic voice of God.

**Woe is me for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!** Isaiah expects to be struck did since he has been in the presence of the Holy God. Perhaps he is remembering what happened to King Uzziah when he went into the temple where the LORD's presence resided. Isaiah gives an honest heartfelt prayer of confession of who he is and what he deserves. But what he deserves is not what he will receive.

**Isaiah 6: 6-7 <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."**

What Isaiah deserves as a sinner is death, not just temporal death but an eternal dying that is eternal separation from the Holy God. What he receives is grace and mercy. It comes to him from the LORD through the work of a seraphim, who brings to him a burning live coal from the altar of incense in the Holy Place of the temple. This altar was the place the prayers of the people ascend to the LORD who promises to answer them graciously. From this altar comes the LORD's answer to Isaiah's prayer of confession: "***Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for***"

Instead of receiving what Isaiah deserves or earns, he receives this wonderful gift of grace. It's a gift that would cost someone His life; not Isaiah, but one that the Heavenly Father would send almost 800 years later. The Father send His Only Son who would pay the price for this gift of grace by giving His life on the cross. Isaiah's sin and guilt weren't just forgotten out of hand by God. Our holy LORD can't just consider sin; Isaiah's sin or our sin as no longer mattering. The wage of sin is death. And that's what Christ paid for you. He paid the eternal suffering and death you and I owe as people with unclean lips and unclean heart. He could do so because He was truly a man. But He could take upon Himself the suffering of all mankind because He is at the same time truly God. His death and resurrection speak the same message to you as what Isaiah heard: "***Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for***"

## **Isaiah's Call to Serve the LORD**

**Isaiah 6:8 And 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."**

How does Isaiah respond to receiving this wonderous gift of grace? He answers God's call to share His message of Law and Gospel to people who desperately need to hear it. He does it not to earn God's favor or earn His forgiveness, he already has these. He does it because God's grace and mercy poured out upon him has changed him forever. It's changed me. It is changing you. That's because along with it comes the Holy Spirit who is at work in our lives to change us. He is at work in our ever so reluctant hearts so that, when the opportunity comes to serve, we give the same response as Isaiah did: "***Here I am! Send me!***"

**Isaiah 6:9-10** <sup>9</sup> And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' <sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Why is it these people will hear but not understand, and will see but not perceive? Because their heart is dull, or better yet is hardened. Notice God addresses them as "this people" and not "my people". That's because they refuse to accept the free gift of grace that is being offered. They refuse to recognize the sin that's being pointed out, so they refuse to recognize and admit there is a need for repentance. The people of Isaiah's day would see the problem not with themselves or their lack of faith, but with the messenger, with Isaiah. It's the same problem with the world we live in now. Our sinful culture doesn't see the problem as being with their love of all that is immoral and sinful and opposed to God's will and plan and desire. The problem is with the Church that calls out the ways that culture opposes God. Like Isaiah we call out these things not in hatred or anger, but out of love. If they would only truly hear the word of God and repent and turn to Him in the faith that was being offered, the Gospel would change their hearts and lives, and they would be healed now and for eternity. And some have turned and believed in our day, and God willing more will. But just as in Isaiah's day many will refuse. They will refuse to believe all the way to their grave.

**Isaiah 6:11-12** <sup>11</sup>Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, <sup>12</sup> and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

How long, Isaiah asked, was this message to be preached, and how long would the people refuse to hear it. The LORD replies it would be until the people of Judah and Jerusalem see their land and their beautiful city destroyed, and themselves taken away into exile. The Church of our day has the same commission to keep preaching our message of Law and Gospel. We are to continue until the Last Day, the day when this entire world as we know it will be destroyed. And those who refused to listen to and believe God's message will find themselves taken into permanent and eternal exile where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth forever and ever.

In His great mercy and grace the LORD kept a remnant of His people alive and in faith, and after 60 years of exile they were allowed to return home. The LORD is working through us today to keep His remnant, the Church, in faith unto life everlasting. He the Jews alive and in faith with the promise of the Savior that was to come. He keeps us alive as His Church with our faith in the Savior that has already come, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

## **Conclusion**

You and I do not have the same call that Isaiah did. He was a prophet who preached and wrote the very word of God. You and I have been given this word from the prophets and the Apostles, and all we are called to do is share it through our words and actions. Like Isaiah, many who will hear our witness will ignore it. They will laugh at the Law and ignore the promises of the Gospel. But that's OK. As with Isaiah he was not judged on his success or failure in getting people to believe. Only God the Holy Spirit has the power to change hearts and minds. And although He doesn't need us, He chooses to use us as His tools to communicate this life changing word to those around us. We are just His mouthpiece. He does the real work in people's hearts and minds. And who knows the effect our ministry may have on the lives of others as the Spirit continues to work on them after we have gone? You will not always be the faithful witness God has called you to be. You and I are still sinners who miss out on the divine appointments God has for us. But when that happens, and we cry out in conviction of our sins "Woe is me", remember God's response to Isaiah: ***"Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for"*** May you hold fast to that message and proclaim it to those around you now unto life everlasting. Amen.