

We looked at Isaiah chapter six when we studied the attribute of God’s holiness. Today we will focus on the call of God to Isaiah and to us. This is such an important chapter because it gives us one of the first insights into the throne room of heaven (Job 1:6), but also because it shows us how God calls an individual into the privilege of serving Him.

It begins by telling us the time in which it took place. It was the year that King Uzziah had died (740 B.C.). I believe his 52 year reign was the longest in Judah’s history. He started his reign at the age of 16 (2 Chronicles 26:3). He was a godly king and very successful. He strengthened the army and equipped it, added to the defense systems of Jerusalem, and subjugated the Amorites.

The temptation that those who are godly and successful often face is pride. It happens with nations and with individuals. When we do the right thing, the natural results are often prosperity. It isn’t always the case. I’m not talking about the prosperity gospel. If we do our work as unto the Lord and are fair and honest, the usual result is often financial increase (Ephesians 6:7). People want to employ us because they can trust us. They don’t want to lose us and so they give raises and promotions.

In the Old Testament, when Israel represented God to the world, God would prosper them when they were obedient. That drew the world to consider the God of Israel. Uzziah was an obedient king and so God prospered him. But then Uzziah began to think that he should be able to do the things the priests do. He thought he should be able to go into the Holy Place and offer incense. The law of God said that was only the privilege of the descendants of Aaron (Numbers 16:40). Uzziah thought God was so pleased with him that the Word of God did not apply to him.

It is the same cycle that many fallen spiritual leaders have followed. They became successful and influential. They allow demands on their time to keep them from time in prayer and the Word. They began to think it was something in them that brought their success. A temptation came along, whether financial or sexual, and they thought they were so favored that they were above the Word. That ends their ministry. The grace of God can forgive them when they repent, but rarely is the privilege of ministry restored.

Uzziah went into the Holy Place and offered incense at the altar of incense. The priests came to resist him, and God smote Uzziah with leprosy. That was a very humbling disease in Judah. It meant isolation from everyone (Leviticus 13:45). The fame he so relished could no longer be enjoyed. The grace of God humbled him and brought him back into a right relationship with his Maker. That same grace referred to him as a king who did what was right before the eyes of the Lord (2 Chronicles 27:2).

It must have been a shock to the nation when he died. Most people had only known his kingship and the prosperity of his reign. Perhaps it was this loss that sent Isaiah to the earthly Temple to pray when he suddenly saw the reality in heaven (Hebrews 8:5). <sup>1</sup> In

**Commented [PW1]: Job 1:6 (ESV)**  
<sup>6</sup> Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.

**Commented [PW2]: 2 Chronicles 26:3 (ESV)**  
<sup>3</sup> Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem.

**Commented [PW3]: Ephesians 6:7 (ESV)**  
<sup>7</sup> rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,

**Commented [PW4]: Numbers 16:40 (ESV)**  
<sup>40</sup> to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the LORD, lest he become like Korah and his company—as the LORD said to him through Moses.

**Commented [PW5]: Leviticus 13:45 (ESV)**  
<sup>45</sup> “The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’”

**Commented [PW6]: 2 Chronicles 27:2 (ESV)**  
<sup>2</sup> And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD according to all that his father Uzziah had done, except he did not enter the temple of the LORD. But the people still followed corrupt practices.

**Commented [PW7]: Hebrews 8:5 (ESV)**  
<sup>5</sup> They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”

*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 6:1

When someone sees the Lord, they are seeing Jesus, the manifestation of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). But this is Jesus in His glory. That glory filled the heavenly temple. The throne that He sits on is the heavenly Ark of the Covenant. He was sitting on the mercy seat upon which He would one day sprinkle His own blood (Hebrews 9:12). That blood would come between the Shekinah (the light of God) and the Law that condemns us within the Ark of the Covenant. Just as grace had intervened in the life of King Uzziah, so grace would intervene for all mankind in a future day. Isn't it wonderful that this is where Jesus was seated? It's as if He was waiting till that perfect time in history when He could pour out His blood and sprinkle it on that very place for all who would come to Him in repentance (Galatians 4:4).

*<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!"* Isaiah 6:2-3 Seraphim, the burning ones, are glorious beings. Their voices were created to praise God. Their eyes were made to see His glory, but they have to cover them in His presence, for there is so much glory emanating from Him that they are unable to take it all in. Instead, they look into the earth and see the glorious deeds of the Lord in the lives of everyone He has created (Acts 17:26).

Everywhere they look they see God's gracious acts. They see God orchestrating every life to draw each one to Himself. They see the wonder that God would let man choose to reject Him. They marvel that sinful man could be given the grace to repent and receive forgiveness. Detail after detail in every life on the planet they see orchestrated by an all-knowing, all-powerful God. The attribute that fills their thoughts and praise is holiness.

"Holy" when applied to God means to be utterly different from fallen humanity. It is to be of another type altogether. It is the difference between the unlimited Creator and fallen, limited creation. We can't even imagine the extent of the holiness of God. We wouldn't just need to cover our eyes with our hands, we would be seeking for a hole in which to hide. And that is exactly how anyone would feel in the presence of the glorified Jesus as the foundations of the threshold tremble.

*<sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.* Isaiah 6:4 The reference to smoke is another sign of grace. The High Priest would fill the Holy of Holies with smoke before he would enter on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:13). The idea was that he needed something so that God could not see him clearly, for in spite of his preparations he was bound to be impure. Thus, smoke represented the grace that will overlook present sin and not bring judgment, for the payment for sin will one day be paid.

*<sup>5</sup> 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*

**Commented [PW8]: Colossians 1:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

**Commented [PW9]: Hebrews 9:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

**Commented [PW10]: Galatians 4:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

**Commented [PW11]: Acts 17:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

**Commented [PW12]: Leviticus 16:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.

*hosts!*" Isaiah 6:5 The anointed prophet of God felt just as filthy as you or I would feel in the presence of the glorified Christ. He now realizes that the messages he has been proclaiming to the nation of Judah are for him as well. His lips are as unclean as theirs. He feels the weight of his sin and the justice his sins deserve (Romans 6:23). His filthiness is before the holy God of eternity, and he feels utterly lost.

The grace of God helps us see our sin. God was doing for Isaiah what He had done for Uzziah. He was bringing humility into Isaiah's life to keep him from the pride that separates us from God. Isaiah would not be the instrument God planned for him to be until he recognized the messages he would proclaim are for him as well. As long as he distanced himself from the people, his message would not have the passion and connecting power that it could have. **Pride mutes our message. Humility conveys it.**

This is the beginning of a call to true service. We can't really serve as we should until we see our sinfulness. We can't really be saved unless we are convicted of sin and recognize our need for a Savior (John 16:8). In many cases, recognition that we are as sinful as anyone else is essential to receiving the call of God to serve. If we are not humbled and repentant, our service is usually for our ego. But when we see the depths of our sin, the call of God to serve is realized as the extravagant grace of the God who loves us in spite of ourselves. We can then serve humbly out of a heart of gratitude and love (Psalm 2:11).

Isaiah was calling the nation to repentance while not realizing he was just as in need as his audience. Now he sees it and has confessed it. That is when sin can be atoned. *<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."* Isaiah 6:6-7 One of the burning ones took a coal from the altar with tongs, and carried it in his hand.

Is this the altar of incense or the altar of sacrifice? I believe this is referring to the altar of sacrifice which foreshadowed the cross of Jesus, God's perfect sacrifice. Symbolically, this is pointing to the sacrifice of Jesus cleansing us from our sin, and purging iniquity from our lives. This is the life transforming power of Christ in us, the hope of glory enabling us to serve Him now and forever in eternity. The Lord baptizes us with the Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11). He cleanses us in His sight, but then works it out in our every day experiences throughout our lifetime.

Isaiah's sense of guilt was gone. He would have a prophecy of how that was possible in his 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter (Isaiah 53:10). His sin was atoned for. Atoned means reconciled. The books balance. There is no more debt. And this is the second part of the call. First we are convicted of our sin and repent. Next, we receive the gift of forgiveness made possible through the cross.

*<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 I am! Send me."* Isaiah 6:8 Now Isaiah has his recall notice. He had already been serving, but now he would serve with a humble spirit and a clean heart. Now he can hear the voice of God calling personally to him. It wasn't that he couldn't

**Commented [PW13]: Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Commented [PW14]: John 16:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

**Commented [PW15]: Psalm 2:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

**Commented [PW16]: Matthew 3:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**Commented [PW17]: Isaiah 53:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

hear it before, but now his heart is sensitized to hear it applied to him. The Lord is calling out to us all. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for me?"

Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send laborers into His harvest (Matthew 9:38). Do you hear the call go out from the throne room of God? Isaiah did. Now he could stand up as a new creation and say, "Here I am! I'm willing. I'm a recipient of grace. God is so great He can even use me (Ephesians 3:8). I'm a sinner saved by grace and I owe my very life to my Savior. Lord, would You give me the privilege of allowing me to serve you? May I enjoy the freedom of serving the One I was created to serve? Please send me."

What a privilege it is to serve Almighty God (Psalm 100:2). But the message is not always a joyous one and the service is not always a walk in the park (Acts 9:16). The harder it is, the more we are honored to expend our lives in His service. <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."* Isaiah 6:9-10 We usually focus on the first eight verses of this chapter, but these two verses are the ones emphasized in the New Testament (Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39-41). The early believers faced fierce resistance to the gospel of grace. The gospel proclaimed melts hearts or hardens them. There's no in-between.

The final part of the call is the commission. Isaiah asked to be sent and God said, "Go!" Then God gave him the message. I think God waits till last to give us the message because we might not be so eager if we know what the message is. Isaiah's message was that the people of Judah had to go into captivity to be purified of their idolatry and prepared for the coming of the Messiah. Until they went into captivity, they would not yield to the message from God. If they repented, it would be short term and halfhearted, just to save them from calamity. But before long, they would be right back to their old ways. The healing would be short lived. It was better for them that they did not hear. This, too, is the grace of God.

Our message is the same and our nation is just as hard. The Gospel is our message. We are sinners condemned to judgment (Romans 3:23). Jesus took the punishment we deserve. If we will acknowledge our wickedness, our selfish evil ways, truly repent, and ask God for forgiveness, then we can receive the grace and mercy of God made possible through the cross. Jesus paid our debt (Ephesians 5:2). All we need do is receive it. Then we can hear the Lord call to us. "Who will go for us?" You don't have to go, but it is a privilege to be sent. Isaiah recognized the freedom and joy of service.

In our Bible study we are learning that freedom isn't doing what we want. That often leads to bondage. **Freedom is doing what we were made to do.** It is living in accord with reality. God prepared good works in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). There is joy in serving the One that loves us so much. There is peace doing what you know is pleasing to God. But you don't have to respond. You can live a boring life just trying to

**Commented [PW18]: Matthew 9:38 (ESV)**  
<sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

**Commented [PW19]: Ephesians 3:8 (ESV)**  
<sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

**Commented [PW20]: Psalm 100:2 (ESV)**  
<sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

**Commented [PW21]: Acts 9:16 (ESV)**  
<sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

**Commented [PW22]: Matthew 13:14-15 (ESV)**  
<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.'"

<sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

**Commented [PW23]: Mark 4:12 (ESV)**  
<sup>12</sup> so that "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

**Commented [PW24]: Luke 8:10 (ESV)**  
<sup>10</sup> he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'

**Commented [PW25]: John 12:39-41 (ESV)**  
<sup>39</sup> Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,  
<sup>40</sup> "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."  
<sup>41</sup> Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

**Commented [PW26]: Romans 3:23 (ESV)**  
<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

**Commented [PW27]: Ephesians 5:2 (ESV)**  
<sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**Commented [PW28]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**  
<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

pay your bills and gathering toys that distract you from the reason God made you. If you have truly come to know forgiveness I don't think you will be content, but you can choose that.

Isaiah was a little concerned about the extent of this judgment and the length of the call. After all, it was a hard message he had to proclaim. Some people think that they will have to stand on a street corner and preach, or move to Africa as a missionary. Maybe. But God needs people right where you are to show people what it is like to live for Jesus as a clerk, or laborer, or business owner, or whatever occupation you have. Every part of society needs people who are ready to share the difference Jesus makes in our hearts and minds. The opportunities will present themselves because God has so planned it. We just need to be ready and committed to step into the opportunities when they come.

So Isaiah asked, <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.* Isaiah 6:11-12 I don't think that was the answer that Isaiah was hoping for. He probably would have preferred something like, "Three months." But the answer was that he would serve until the captivity came to pass. At least God didn't tell him the whole story by saying, "Until you are sawn in half by the people that remain in the land."

God rarely tells us the trouble will face. He does give us the grace when we face it. The call of God is a lifelong call. There is no retirement. The message is a tough one. It's offensive, but it's gracious as well. We are investing in eternity, and you don't want to quit this short gig without being fully invested for the long term (Philippians 3:13-14).

Even the remnant that remained in the land would be purged again. <sup>13</sup> *And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.* Isaiah 6:13 Judah would be refined and refined again. If only one out of ten people remained in the land, God would purge them as well. The cleansing fire of God would deal with their idolatry.

My wife and I cut down an oak that was shading our garden. The stump immediately started to sprout new shoots. We wacked them off, but we have to keep doing it. The life remains. Isaiah closed this chapter with a promise. The holy seed is the stump. The ancestors of the coming Messiah were being purged, and even though the nation would be decimated, the line of the Messiah would remain. Uzziah had died, but the line of David remained. God is faithful to His Word.

From Eve to Abraham, to David, to the stump that remained, God's promise was still active (Genesis 3:15). He can't deny His Word. This sad message of Isaiah had a golden lining. God was not done with Israel. The Messiah would be born. Our sins will be atoned. The call of God will go out to millions more who hear, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" The testimony of God's goodness and His ways will go around the

**Commented [PW29]: Philippians 3:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

**Commented [PW30]: Genesis 3:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

world. Every nation will hear of the gracious offer of salvation to all who will call on the Lord, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

If you are a believer, you are somewhere in the process of this call. Have you been convicted of sin and humbled? Then did you confess and receive the atonement God offers in Jesus? Then have you heard Him ask if you would be His witness? We know His message for our day. Have you discovered the unique way and place in which God would have you deliver it (Romans 12:3)? This is freedom. This joy! This is the life that God is calling us to, as testified to by the life and words of Isaiah.

### Questions

- 1 What was Uzziah's testimony?
- 2 Where is Jesus seated?
- 3 Why is there smoke in the Holy Place?
- 4 What did God do for Uzziah and Isaiah?
- 5 Why is this essential to our calling?
- 6 What should follow conviction?
- 7 How does the altar of sacrifice foreshadow the cross?
- 8 What is the choice then before us?
- 9 When do we retire from this calling?
- 10 Review each step of the call of God.
- 11 Who is the "holy seed?"

**Commented [PW31]: Matthew 24:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

**Commented [PW32]: Romans 12:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.