

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #12

Isaiah 6:5-7

There is in the New Testament a marvelous provision of grace that is offered to every single believer in Jesus Christ. If we will confess our sin, we may be forgiven of our sin (I John 1:9). But the problem is the believer will not ever confess his sin, if he doesn't see himself to be a sinner. I love something Dr. J. Vernon McGee said years ago; if you feel worthy before God or think you merit something with God, you have "never really seen the Lord" (Vol. III, p. 209).

Now I believe that **Isaiah 6** sits right where it actually happened in Isaiah's life. He had been faithfully and prophetically ministering during the reign of Uzziah in the first five chapters of Isaiah and then in **chapter 6** he gets this vision. If our interpretation is accurate, what you have here is a very faithful man of God taken to see things at the throne of God. It is kind of like what happened to the Apostle John. He had been faithfully ministering for over 50 years and then he was caught up to see the throne of God (Revelation 4ff.).

The throne of God, by every Biblical account, is a very sacred and pure place. Even though Isaiah had been a spokesman for God on earth, he is not at God's throne running his mouth; he is in total silence, reverence and awe. Now keep in mind that this is probably the most spiritual man on the face of the earth who is privileged by God to be able to see His throne, and this did for Isaiah what it will do for any who go into God's presence. The point you see in these verses is this:

AT THE THRONE OF GOD ISAIAH IS COMPLETELY HUMBLED BY GOD'S HOLINESS AND BY HIS OWN SINFULNESS AND GOD COMPLETELY AND GRACIOUSLY CLEANSSES HIM, WHICH MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR GOD TO USE HIM.

As we observed last time, **Isaiah 6** breaks down nicely into four main parts. Last week we saw the first part - Isaiah has a lofty vision of the Lord (6:1-4). Today we see parts 2 and 3.

PART #2 – Isaiah has a humble response to the lofty vision of the Lord. **6:5**

The sight of a God who is sitting on His throne high and lifted up, and the song of the Seraphim singing "Holy, Holy, Holy" and the shaking of the foundations of the temple and the glorious smoke, brought overwhelming conviction to the mind and heart of Isaiah, as to just how far short of God's glory he truly was. It humbled him and he knew his level of righteousness did not come close to God's. Now this conviction was on one, if not "the" greatest prophet of God ever. There were two main responses of Isaiah:

Response #1 - He pronounces a woe judgment on himself. **6:5a**

Had Israel been willing to do what Isaiah did here, acknowledge her own sinfulness, things in Israel would be much different today. But in Isaiah's day, in Jesus' day and in our day, Israel lives in some delusional religious fog that doesn't believe she needs to repent of anything.

Isaiah had been pronouncing six “woe” judgments on Judah, Jerusalem and Israel in chapter 5 (v. 8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22) and now he pronounces a seventh “woe” judgment on himself. Isaiah said “woe” is me for I am “ruined.”

The particular Hebrew word “ruined” (damah) means that Isaiah believed that he was about to be cut off, made to cease and destroyed (*The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 198). The Niphal stem and perfect tense of the verb indicates that he was confident that his complete demise was imminent and that he had brought this action on himself. In other words Isaiah believed that he justly deserved to be cut off from the Holy God.

This is a far cry from those pompous arrogant religious people who think they can earn heaven or deserve to be there by their works. Isaiah believed by his works he deserved condemnation.

Response #2 - He pinpoints the reason he deserves to be condemned. **6:5b**

The causal clause, which begins with the word “because,” tells us the reason why he pronounces this “woe” judgment on himself; not because he had pursued a lifestyle of evil sin, but because of his evil speech.

Now it will become evident by the words used in **verse 7**, ‘iniquity’ and ‘sin’ that Isaiah had sinned in more ways than just in speech, but this was the one sin this prophet knew polluted him the most.

Isaiah realized standing before the Holy throne of God that he had not used his speech in ways that were always holy. In fact, the word “unclean” (tameh), which is used twice in this verse, is one that means to say things God considers to be ceremonially defiled and polluted (Ibid., p. 379). The word covers all kinds of polluted speech - whether something God deems as idolatrous, sexual, or speech that is dead. Apparently, as Isaiah is standing at God’s throne and he is remembering, just like Jesus said he would, “every careless word” that has come out of his mouth (Matthew 12:36).

Now keep in mind that this is a prophet of God who, most of the time, is given to communicating the truth of God. But when he got before the throne of God, he realized his words hadn’t always been pure. He had probably gossiped about others and a time or two verbally said things that he knew were wrong.

Lest people think this is just Isaiah’s problem, he says, “I live among a people of unclean lips.” The whole world, religious and non-religious world is a world of sinful speech. Every boy, girl, man and woman knows this is true. All in the world have used their speech in ways that make us guilty before God. Children say things demeaning about their parents or their teachers or even their church leaders. Moms and dads say all kinds of things they regret.

This whole world has a major speech problem. Cursing, lying, gossiping, filthy talk, idolatrous talk, out of control emotional talk is not cute to God. It will bring His condemnation and Isaiah knew it. Perhaps Isaiah was thinking about times he had spoken out against God’s leadership, after all, some of the kings Isaiah lived through had some serious problems.

The thing that specifically caused Isaiah to know how depraved he is was that his “eyes had seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” As Isaiah stood before the throne of God and saw the glory of Jesus Christ, he was struck with the overwhelming sense that he had no business being there because his speech had not always praised God; it had been filled with many moments of unclean defilement.

There are some verbal vipers that are going to be silenced and judged one day. People may think they have their ‘freedom of speech’ and that gives them the license to say any thing about any one at any time. They may shoot off their mouths about world leaders, state leaders, employment leaders, church leaders and think it is their right to say whatever they want. God sees it completely different and one day they will too.

The Bible is filled with many passages that clearly teach God will hold one accountable for what he/she said (Matt. 12:36; Luke 12:2-3; Gal. 5:19-20; Eph. 4:29-32; James 3:1). God will hold people accountable for careless words (Matt. 12:36-37); hypocritical words (Luke 12:1-3); anger outburst words (Gal. 5:20-21); dissension words (Gal. 5:20-21); unwholesome words (Eph. 4:29); slanderous words (Eph. 4:31); filthy words (Eph. 5:4); false words (Eph. 4:25); gossipy words (I Peter 3:10); faulty doctrine words (James 3:1).

I can guarantee that if a prophet like Isaiah is standing at the throne of God under total conviction about his words, when we get before God’s throne we won’t have any problem being under terrible conviction for our sin to the point we will acknowledge to God that we deserve His condemnation.

For the believer in Jesus Christ, words will not actually be a matter of condemnation, but they will be a critical matter in determining reward and loss of reward at the Bema Seat judgment.

To be greatly used by God we need to see God as high and holy and see ourselves as lowly and sinful. If a person wants to strut through life seeing himself or herself as some better-than-thou spiritual giant, God won’t use him or her for much of anything. Great servants of God stand before God and say ‘woe is me.’ ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’

PART #3 – Isaiah is completely cleansed from His sin. **6:6-7**

As soon as Isaiah acknowledged his sin, it is interesting that the Seraphim do not banish Isaiah from the throne, they clean him up.

What the Seraphim actually do here, they do because this is the will of God at the throne of God, and even though we have no record of them getting a command of God to do this to Isaiah, they obviously know what their responsibilities are.

There are actually four Seraphim actions pertaining to Isaiah:

Seraphim Action #1 - One Seraphim flew to Isaiah . **6:6a**

When one gets before the throne of God, one will not get lost in a crowd. There will be a personal, individual assessment of each person. All heavenly eyes will be on us when it is our turn. Each person will know and admit he is sinful and guilty before God.

What actually happens here is probably not what Isaiah expected to happen. I am certain that once he realized how dirty and filthy a sinner he was, he expected God to send an angel to cast him into eternal fire. He knew he didn't deserve to be here. He knew he was polluted and he knew he deserved the condemnation of God. But what happens next is pure grace.

Seraphim Action #2 - The Seraphim had in his hand a burning coal he took from the altar .
6:6b

You had better thank God for what you see right here. Not only in heaven does God have an exalted throne , but He also has an atoning altar .

Now the altar was the place where blood sacrifices were made and burned. Isaiah knew that, for he had been involved in these things in the temple of Jerusalem. Blood and fire were always involved in resolving sin matters. So when one of the Seraphim goes to the altar and gets this coal, Isaiah clearly understands that this is the sacred spot of judgment, where one may find cleansing. **Notice carefully, Isaiah's sin problem is not going to be resolved by the angel , it is resolved by the altar .** The angel must go to the altar, for cleansing comes from there. All purity must come from God, not an angel. Even though the angel will be used to administer the cleansing, he is not the author of the cleansing.

Now notice that the angel can carry the burning coal in his hand, but he must take the coal from the altar with tongs. The reason for this is because the altar is so sacred that even this high ranking angel cannot directly touch it. The burning coal or stone was a stone on which the sacrifice and incense were placed.

We agree with Dr. Ironside that this altar Isaiah sees is a prefigure of the sacred cross of Jesus Christ. You must see yourself as a filthy sinner and by faith go to that sacred altar for cleansing (*Isaiah*, p. 39).

Seraphim Action #3 - The Seraphim touched Isaiah's mouth with the coal. **6:7a**

Now clearly the thing we must see here is that true purity comes from God, not from us. I agree with John Calvin and Edward Young; this is not conversion here, this is promotion. God was fine tuning and cleaning Isaiah so he could raise him up and use him at another level.

This cleansing would enable Isaiah to go from this place as God's pure ambassador and prophet.

Seraphim Action #4 - The Seraphim inform Isaiah he has just been cleansed. **6:7b**

In order for Isaiah to fully grasp what is happening here, there must be clear, accurate communication of what is taking place. Isaiah is not left to wonder what this is all about; he is given an explanation.

There are people who believe that they can just see the Word of God and understand it all without any exposition or explanation. You do not find that idea anywhere in the Bible and you do not find that idea at the throne of God. Even at God's throne there is teaching and instruction.

John Calvin, in making this point, really went after the Catholic Church and what he called their 'stage plays' of communion. He said the whole symbolism of the communion service is carefully spelled out in the Word and it needs to be carefully taught, but as Calvin said, it does not happen in "everyday popery" (*Isaiah*, Vol. 7, p. 212).

Now what exactly is Isaiah seeing here? What he is seeing is that his actual cleansing comes from the sacred altar. The Seraphim informed Isaiah that two marvelous grace actions had just taken place:

(Grace Action #1) - Isaiah's iniquity had been taken away by God. **6:7c**

The Hebrew word "iniquity" refers to all of the wickedness that makes Isaiah guilty before God was just taken away (*Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, p. 359).

(Grace Action #2) - Isaiah's sin had just been forgiven by God. **6:7d**

The word "sin" means that all the times Isaiah had missed the mark of God's righteous standards had just been forgiven (*Ibid.*, p. 654). The word "forgiven" (*kapar*) is a critical word which is at the core of God's sacrificial system. It is a word that means to make an atonement for sin, which appeases God to the point that the sin is wiped clean away (*Ibid.*, p. 44-45).

Atonement comes by means of a sacrifice which so covers the sin that it is no longer seen by God.

I am going to tell you something right now based on this text. Until you are willing to personally yourself go before God and acknowledge that you are an evil sinner compared to Him, you will never amount to much of anything for God nor be used by God.

If you want to strut through life in all of your Pharisaical piety telling others how glad you are that you aren't some depraved sinner who needs cleansing, you may impress people, but you will never, never ever be greatly used by God. In fact, as Dr. John Calvin said, "You'll spend your life living a delusion and never can see light from darkness and truth from falsehood" (Calvin, p. 208).

The truth is, when you accurately see God for who He is, you will accurately see you for who you are.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He said that part of the Holy Spirit's work would be to convict one of sin. Those who are in tune with the Holy Spirit have a deep, accurate awareness of their own sinfulness and God's majestic holiness.

There is a great illustration of this when Jesus Christ was hanging on the cross. Christ was hanging between two criminals who deserved to die. They both had committed the same types of crimes that made them guilty and left them condemned. The only difference between the two thieves was that one of them admitted he was sinful and deserved the punishment and the other didn't. That honest admission was the difference between heaven and hell. One turned to Jesus realizing his need of grace and the other did not.

Have you personally and individually seen yourself as God sees you, a dirty, filthy sinner who needs cleansing? Will you acknowledge that you have said things you know that have not pleased God?

You may find complete cleansing, but that cleansing may only come from one altar, the cross of Jesus Christ. If you want all your iniquity taken away and all your sins forgiven, by faith look to that cross and ask God to cleanse you and if you will, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow."