

June 13th, 2021
The Third Sunday after Pentecost

A Traumatic Experience

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pure and acceptable in your sight, oh Lord our heavenly Father, our rock and our salvation, Amen. Well last week in our first unity service, we took a look at Isaiah. Isaiah was in the midst of a traumatic time in Judah. King Uzziah had died and anytime the leader of a country dies it is a traumatic time of sorrow. It's a traumatic solemn time and God came to Isaiah in that time of trouble. He came in a vision and Isaiah saw God and he saw the host of heaven praising God and saying holy, holy, holy. And as we saw last week this is the nature of God, the holy God. He comes to us in our time of need. We can go to Him in our time of need and know that He is there. At that same time, we should stand in awe of God, because we are literally in His presence.

But I'd like to take last week and that concept of losing a leader and it being a traumatic experience and build on that trauma. Because what is more traumatic than that; than losing the leader of a country? Well, I would dare say that the most traumatic experience, is to literally meet God. Why?

Let me begin by sharing with you a little bit of a story I heard is on a podcast by R.C. Sproul. He was sharing how a woman from Oakland came to him and was complaining about her church and when he asked for specifics, he was thinking would be your normal kind of problems. Oh, you know, the liturgy, or oh, the hymns, or oh the music. But no, she was very precise. She said, 'I'm struggling with the pastor because our pastor has de-fanged God. God has been tamed in the view of our pastor.' You know, I believe that she was on to a very major problem within the church today. That for the sake of political correctness, or for the sake of people's emotions, we have begun to soft peddle the biblical portrait of God. Why? Because the holiness of God is a very traumatic thing to the unholy.

I'd like you to consider the biblical portrait of God in His interaction with people let's start with Job. I think everyone would agree with me, Job is one of the great ones in the Bible. It was Job who wanted to make his case before God. And then when God answered him and arrived on the scene, it was Job who said, I quote, "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Or how about the prophet Habakkuk, who sounded very 21st century when looking at what was going on in the world and in society and he asked God, I quote, "How can you stand by?" And God came to Habakkuk. And what was the prophet's response? Again, I quote, "I hear and my body trembles, my lips quiver at the sound, rottenness enters my bones, my legs tremble beneath me." Sounds like maybe he was a little scared straight.

But now let's go to Isaiah. Remember last week, and he was no slouch of a prophet. The prophet to four kings, the number one prophet when it comes to messianic prophecies. When he has this vision of God, what was his response? "Woe is me." Three words that are absolutely loaded. To understand that we have to have a little bit of context and have a little bit of understanding of certain things of significance.

First of all, we need to establish who or what a prophet was or is. I think the easiest way to do it is to contrast the priest with the prophet. The priest is the one who spoke to God on behalf of the people. The prophet is the reverse. The prophet is the one who would speak to the people on behalf of God. Now when you look at the prophets, you know Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all of those; you will never find a prophet beginning prophecy by saying, 'you know, I think,' or 'you know, my considered opinion is,' or 'perhaps we should consider.' No, the words of the prophets come in what we call oracles, messages from heaven and they begin like this: "Thus says the Lord."

Now understand when these prophets speak, these oracles can be oracles of hope, or oracles of woe. We have really lost sight of the word hope in the English language because it's, 'you know I hope I win the lottery.' 'I hope the giants win.' It's wishful thinking. But in the Bible, the word hope is, and I quote, "a guaranteed expectation," and it is a

positive expectation. Oracles of hope usually begin like this; “Thus says the Lord, blessed are blank, blank, blank. Or, for instance, Jesus employs this in the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of my name. Blessed are the peacemakers.” Now oracles of woe are in absolute contrast to hope. Hope is a guaranteed positive expectation. Woe is guaranteed destruction, judgment, condemnation. And so, Amos speaks to Damascus, Syria, and says “woe unto you.” Jesus says in Matthew chapter 23, “Woe to you Scribes, you Pharisees, and you teachers of the law,” and He then continues on.

Now when it comes to these things, both positive and bad, you can take that guaranteed destruction, and make it even stronger than that, guaranteed destruction and annihilation. You can do it using that repetition form, like we heard last week, the seraphim saying, ‘holy, holy, holy. Now consider that superlative repetition being applied to woe, woe, woe. Revelation 8:13 It is Godly judgment guaranteed for all eternity. And this is what Isaiah experienced when he the unholy one, is in the presence of The Holy One, he says, “woe is me.” And then he continues on saying, ‘for I am lost.’ That’s the ESV version and I like it. There’s other versions that go with I’m ruined, or I’m undone. But I like, this translation, “for I am lost.” Consider in our society today, you know people will refer to individuals and say, ‘oh they went on this trip, and they found themselves,’ and what does that mean? Well, they have it together now. And at the same time, people will absolutely lose control and people will say, “oh man, he totally lost it!”

Now I want you to think about that, “for I am lost.” When the presence of the holy God, the Creator of the universe, we lose, we lose it. What do we lose? We lose control. But we also with that control, or loss of control, lose any sense of righteousness, any sense of merit, any sense of good; and it is replaced with a guaranteed destruction, judgment condemnation by The Holy God. And yet society tells us, “Well, nobody’s perfect, or, to err is human, or, you know, everyone’s entitled to one mistake.’ Who says? Certainly not God! You certainly can’t find it in His Word. In fact, His Word says, “But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another they are without understanding.” It’s like a tomato in that VeggieTales cartoon,

that is rotten looking at another rotten tomato and saying, 'I'm better than you.' You're both rotten!

Or as I was working on this sermon, I was thinking about my truck after I hit a deer. Thankfully it wasn't totaled, but a totaled car compared to another totaled car, they're both totaled! Why would you even make the comparison? It is of no worth, no value. It was the problem in our gospel this morning when Jesus gives the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector. You have a sinful pharisee, again in Matthew 23; "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees." You have a sinful pharisee, judging a tax collector who is repenting. Why is it so wrong? Because he is measuring himself by another and saying, 'I'm better than that tax collector, so I must be going to heaven.' And that is not the comparison, the standard is not the other sinful people. The standard is God Himself. And we heard last week, "You shall be holy, as I am holy."

And this is just echoing in Isaiah when he says, woe is me for I am lost. Why? For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. There is a recognition here. Isaiah is saying, I'm bad, they are bad. We are all bad, sinful people. Why the focus on his lips, his mouth, his speech? He understood the power of the mouth. Jesus addresses it Himself in Matthew 12:36 that we will be judged for every idle word we have spoken. Or again in Matthew 15:11 Jesus, Himself speaks about what goes in the mouth isn't what makes it unclean it's what comes out of the mouth. James has quite a bit to say about the mouth, the tongue and what it can do, it can steer the whole ship or the whole body.

But I'd like you to go with me back to last week. We talked about the economy of the Creator. He gives us two hands because you need two hands; two eyes is what gives us depth perception. He gave the Seraphim a pair of wings, two to cover his face, a pair to cover his feet, and a pair to fly with. Exactly the right amount. Consider God gave us only one mouth. That is all we need, and it is a mouth that was created to praise Him, and to build up the body of believers to proclaim the gospel. And all too often, it is used for gossip, to tear others down, to sow division, to cancel others out or literally just destroy.

So, in the presence of a Holy God, all of this welled up in the great prophet. It is a fulfillment of what scripture says in Hebrews 10:31 "It is a fearful thing to be found in the hands of the living God." And fear is a synonym for awe, to stand in awe. But understand that fear can be good, standing in awe God or bad, awfully bad. Because, you know the power of almighty God, that we don't measure up to Him. But let's learn from the prophet and from what the loving God does with His prophet. Notice Isaiah acknowledges his sin. We call it confession and it's why we take time to confess our sins each week. Because we are in the presence of God, and if the prophet takes the time to immediately acknowledge his sin before God, I dare say, 'we're no better than Isaiah.' It would be well, using the words from one of my emails, meet and right and salutary that we do so.

Isaiah acknowledges his sin, he confesses. The next step is to repent, and I am going change. But I want you to notice God stops him. Isaiah makes the comment was me I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of the people of unclean lips, he was probably going to say, and Lord, I'm going to try to do my very best. It's cut off! He doesn't get a chance to finish it. No, the seraphim is dispatched. The ones praising God are dispatched to go to the altar that is burning there, to take a coal from the altar. And the Seraphim comes to Isaiah with that burning coal and he says, 'behold this is touched your lips, your guilt is taken away, your sin atoned for.' That altar is an altar of sacrifice, the fire of sacrifice, the fire of atonement. God takes that, puts it to his lips and absolves him.

Absolution, that is why we do it every Sunday. It is literally patterned after what we're reading here from Isaiah. Confession and our Lord, our God, our holy God, reaches down and says, "Through my son, Jesus, I have absolved you. Your sins are forgiven! You are atoned for! And I ask the question. How do you feel? I think all too often we look at that we go, boy, this liturgy stuff sure takes a lot of time. It would be a lot easier if we just cut out the liturgy. And we are hearing the words of absolution from God like Isaiah did. And how did it make Isaiah feel, and how should it make us feel? Well, here is what happened. God atoned, He forgave Isaiah and then He asked a question. Whom shall I

send and who will go for us? Isaiah took those lips that had been atoned and he answered, "Here am I, send me."

Dear Brothers and Sisters, every Sunday when we walk into church, we walk into the house of the living God, the Holy God. We follow the example of Isaiah; we confess our sins. Before we even have a chance to say and Lord here's my plan for change for repentance; you hear those words "Your sins are atoned for through the blood of Jesus. Your sins are forgiven. And the Holy Spirit is here saying, "Whom shall I send?" Who will go for us? My hope and my prayer is that every week we respond and say here am I send me. And as I think of unity, you already heard it. Here we are, send us. In our Savior's Name, Amen.