



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **The Making of a Servant of God**

Isaiah 6:1-7, 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. <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!”

<sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <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 hosts!”

<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.”

The story of Samuel is somewhat intriguing. Before he was even conceived, his mother began praying that God would give her a child to stand in the gap and so serve the Lord at a time when the love of God’s people had grown cold. God did give her a child who at the age of around 4 was given to the temple to be raised by the priest! The boy grew up sleeping next to the Ark of the Covenant! At an early age, the Lord began speaking to him in visions and dreams such that by adulthood, he was a devout servant of the Lord! Listen to the description of him when he was still a youth!

1 Samuel 3:19-21, “Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.”

This is a wonderful story of the maturation, growth, and calling of a servant of Christ. And yet I believe that this passage is problematic for many of us, or at least how we apply it. See from the account we entertain romantic notions about how God raises up His servants, involving earth shattering calls and life changing encounters.

The call of Samuel is NOT typical! Truly, the “*typical*” servant of Christ which is you and me, is brought forth in a fire. Recall

- Abraham was sent to live by faith in a strange land for 30 years before any fruit would be seen.
- Joseph spent years in slavery.
- Moses was exiled to the wilderness of Sinai for 40 years.
- Hosea’s training would be through the providence of a bad marriage.
- And of Paul we read at his conversion:

Acts 9:16, “...I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

In fact Peter used the refining process of gold to describe how God raises up His servants.

1 Peter 1:6-7, “In this [our glorification] you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be

found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

There is no question the Scripture is clear that God saved us to suffer for Christ that through affliction we would become better worshippers and servants of the Lord (cf. Philippians 1:29-30)! When we were saved, God placed us in a crucible/forge, is currently heating it up, and thereby intends to temper us and so make us fit for His Kingdom and so a vessel useful to the Master!

Yet, what does this entail? What forge have we been placed in? How long will be in there? And what ought we to expect by way of results? Isaiah 6 answers these questions, it is the calling of Isaiah as a prophet in God’s Kingdom. Yet it is far more than the calling of this particular prophet; it reflects the elements involved in the making of any and every servant of God.

## The Forge

Isaiah 6:1, “In the year of King Uzziah’s death...”

If King Uzziah was “just another king” with insignificant regency, this statement would mean as much to us as the death of, say, King Zechariah.

2 Kings 15:8, “In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in Samaria *for* six months.”

The text reads that shortly after his ascension, he was assassinated by Shallum who assumed the throne of Israel in his place. And like Zechariah, Shallum had an “eventful” reign as king lasting a total of one whole month (2 Kings 15:13) before he was assassinated!!

In contrast, Uzziah’s regency lasted fifty-two years by which the southern nation of Judah was ushered into a golden age of:

- Prosperity.
- Autonomy.
- Wealth.
- Security.
- Culture.
- Economic and social development.

Truly, Uzziah was one of the greatest Kings to sit on a throne over God’s people. But unlike many leaders, he loved the Lord such that during his tenure the true worshipper of God was free to serve the Lord without fear of opposition or persecution! Accordingly, Uzziah was the champion of both the worldly Jew as well as the devout. As such, the King became the heart and soul of the nation; the icon, the hope and trust of all, solid ground in a world of shifting

sand! He truly was their “Lord!” Which is why when Uzziah died, the entire nation was shaken- rich, poor, worldly, devout. All would have been crushed upon hearing the news; including Isaiah who at the time had no inkling that God was about to raise him up as a prophet!

Upon hearing of the news, Isaiah, no doubt along with thousands of his fellow countrymen, flocked to the temple where Uzziah’s empty throne obviously had been placed. Here the nation could pray, mourn, and weep. Yet at this time, something amazing occurred in the life of Isaiah, as Isaiah mourned, God transformed this “valley of weeping into a spring!” (Psalm 84:6) In a moment- in the twinkling of an eye all the activities and people disappeared, and Isaiah beheld One sitting on what once was Uzziah’s throne. This Being was unlike anything he had ever seen before!

In that moment Isaiah realized that Uzziah wasn’t the Lord, Christ was! The comfort, security, prosperity, and future of the nation rested NOT with an earthly king or government, but with the Lord who currently sits on the throne of the Universe!

This is “The Forge” in which God places all would-be servants of the Lord. The devastation and destruction of all idols and so false hopes, which is what Uzziah had become to the nation! Listen to Moses speaking of the intent behind God’s vanquishing of the Egyptians.

Exodus 12:12, “For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments [this is the objective of every Forge God ordains for His people: the destruction of all idols. Why? Notice how the text ends...]- I am the Lord.”

Not Pharaoh, Uzziah, your parents, your boss... anything! That is the Forge. So what is the fire.

## The Fire

Isaiah 6:1, “In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.”

Recall that in ancient days, the glory of a king was reflected in the length of the fabric that flowed from his royal robe. In this passage, “the train of God’s robe” filled the temple! In other words, never before or since has there been a king like this!

Isaiah 6:2, “Seraphim stood above Him...”

In the ancient world, kings had magnates and retinue which stood beside them and so “above them.” God’s attendants were/are a specially created being called, Seraphim; literally, “burning ones!” With their down-folded and up-stretched wings they look like huge flames surrounding the throne of God! Now these fiery guardians of the holiness of God.

Isaiah 6:2, “...each ha[d] six wings; with two he covered his face [though they are without

sin, nevertheless God is so great that these perfect, sinless beings cannot look upon Him], and with two he covered his feet [that which represents contact with a sinful world likewise is covered], and with two he flew.”

It is obvious that the emphasis of this entire passage is the Holiness of God!

Isaiah 6:3, “And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts...”

The threefold repetition has been called a “Super-superlative” as it emphasizes the holiness of God! What does that mean? The attribute of “holy” tells us not so much what God is, but what He isn’t! Holy means “separate,” “different,” or “other.” It indicates that whatever is being spoken about is completely different from anything you and I have ever seen or known. In reference to God it indicates that, as the Creator, He is not creation nor is He of creation.

Accordingly, we have an idea of what love looks like. Yet because God is holy, we conclude that His love is unlike anything of this world. We have an idea of what justice is. Yet again, because God is holy, His justice is unlike anything of this world. And so it is when we speak of God’s purpose, plan, priorities, grace, mercy, judgment, and everything else about Him. He is outside of creation; above it and beyond it! Furthermore, these angels cry out.

Isaiah 6:3b, “...the whole earth is full of His glory!”

From this we saw two things:

1. While God is transcendent and so outside of creation, nevertheless He also is near to each of us!
2. Unlike a false god or an idol, our God is a God of substance!
  - a. He answers prayer.
  - b. He controls the fate of kings and nations.
  - c. He upholds all things by the word of His power.
  - d. He protects, strengthens, comforts, and engifts!

Isaiah 6:4, “And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him<sup>1</sup> who called out.”

When God spoke, the structure in which Isaiah knelt trembled! It was like an erupting volcano, a massive earth quake! So great is our God!

Isaiah 6:4, “...while the temple was filling with smoke.”

In the Bible, “smoke” typically accompanies the manifestation of the glory of God (cf. Isaiah 4:5). Accordingly, that “smoke” accompanied the vision of Isaiah tells us that what was beheld was NOT a messenger speaking on behalf of God, BUT the Lord Himself!

With this we behold “The Fire” with which God uses to ready the servant to be molded and shaped. What is that “fire?” It is not suffering for that relates to the forge! What is the fire? It is nothing less than a growing comprehension of the greatness of God! Grow here and your life will be forever changed!

In John’s description of Christ’s ministry on the temple mount just prior to the Lord’s arrest, John quoted our passage, Isaiah 6 and then said speaking of Christ he said:

John 12:41, “These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.”

How do we explain the transformation that took place in the lives of the Apostles? Prior to the Lord’s ascension, they are a huddled mass of frightened individuals. But then Christ ascended, and 11, then 12, and then 13 Apostles transformed the world! What’s to explain the transformation? These 13 men, like Isaiah, beheld the Glory of Christ and were never the same!

This is how God raises up His servants. He places them in a forge where idols and false gods are destroyed. And then He heats it up by slowly confronting the child of God with His own glory! And this brings us to the question. How hot does it have to get? What temperature must be reached before molding and shaping can take place?

## The Fahrenheit

Isaiah 6:5, “Then I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts’”

This reflects the “temperature” necessary for the forging of a Servant of the Lord! And what is that temperature- the Fahrenheit? We do not know for it is not given. The only sign that the temperature has been reached is the effect of the forge/fire in the life of the Christian!

Way before manufacturing brought the common man the thermometer, cooking had to be done by feel. I’m changing the metaphor here from a forge to the making of candy. Today you read in a cook book which says that the caramel in caramel corn must be brought to a temperature ranging from 250-266 degrees before it is ready to be cooled. Yet what if you don’t have a candy thermometer? Talk to a seasoned baker and they will give you a simple test. You take a glass of water and make it ice cold. Then you take a little portion of the caramel and drop it in the water. If it becomes brittle/hard, the desired temperature has been reached. But if it remains chewy, more heat needs to be added.

And this is how the forging of metal swords was accomplished in the ancient day. The blacksmith heated the metal until it could be molded. What was that temperature? Most did not know; it was all a matter of feel/look and the ability to mold/shape the metal. So for the

Christian, what is the temperature that God heats the fire of His glory? That which is necessary to melt his heart! Notice the text!

Isaiah 6:5, "Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!"

"Woe" in the Bible is a malediction and so a pronouncing of doom or damnation; it is the autonomic response of a mortal when standing in the presence of God and amounts to a curse, "Damned am I!"

Judges 6:22-23, "When Gideon saw that [the person he was speaking with] was the angel of the Lord, he said, 'Alas/woe, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.' [IOW, *I'm condemned! There is no hope for me!*] And the Lord said to him, 'Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.'"

The same effect was aroused in the Manoah's heart when he discovered that the "Messenger" who had been speaking to him was God:

Judges 13:22, "So Manoah said to his wife, 'We shall surely die, for we have seen God.'"

That is the idea behind, "Woe!" It is to be undone, void of the arrogance of pride so common in this life. In fact, notice the next word, "for I am ruined." (דָּמָאָה (*dāmâ*)) This is a graphic word which always means to come to a violent end!<sup>2</sup> In essence Isaiah is saying here, "I am devastated by the holiness of God! I'm wiped out... falling apart! I have nothing to offer God and so stand before Him condemned!" Truly, on account of the dethroning of his false gods and the manifesting of the Lord's glory to him, Isaiah concluded:

- He was doomed!
- He could offer no plea, payment, or reward to change his most certain end: death!

Now the question is this: Why was Isaiah so moved? He was moved because God is a loving God! He gives two reasons.

Isaiah 6:5, "because I am a man ["man" is in the emphatic position here, "Man am I..."] of unclean lips."

Feel the awe of the prophet! Isaiah *as a man- a sinful man-* was standing in the presence of a holy God beholding His glory! This necessarily resulted in a profound conviction of sin, "I am a man of unclean lips!"

Heretofore, Isaiah most likely fancied himself as a pretty good guy! Unlike many of his countrymen who had given their heart to Baal, Isaiah remained a true servant of the Lord. God must have been pleased! But then, Isaiah saw a small manifestation of the glory of God, and instantly he knew that he was a miserable, worthless, wretch of a man with nothing to offer

God in recompense! In an instant he knew that “his righteousness was filthy rags! “Rubbish!” in the words of Paul (Philippians 3:8). Furthermore he declares:

Isaiah 6:5, “and I live among a people of unclean lips.”

Heretofore Isaiah would have been well-impressed with the nation of Judah (in spite of its sinful practices); it was indeed the light of the nations.<sup>3</sup> Think of it:

- She had a great king.
- And in comparison to the secular nations, Judah was superior when it came to its
  - Care of the hurting and needy.
  - Judicial system.
  - Worship.
  - Standard of living.

The nation was a light to the Gentiles as Judah bore the law of God ordained by angels! Yet with the “melting of his heart” by the glory of God, Isaiah saw the nation for what it really was, “Unclean!” The second reason Isaiah was “undone” was because for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts: gazing upon God the way he did in this vision, truly Isaiah would never be the same! In fact, the most frequent expression Isaiah used of God in this prophecy is “the holy one of Israel” he used it 26 times!

Again, to spend time in the fire of God’s glory and to be confronted with God’s greatness, the distance that separates the sinner from Him is to be forever changed! Think of Habakkuk. At the beginning of the book, when the prophet knelt to pray, he did so with a sense of impatience toward God:

- *God! How long until you answer my prayer?*
- *What it going to take for you to humble the nation?*
- *Come on God! Act! Don’t just sit there; do something!*

Family of God, we really need to be careful what we pray for, for sometimes, God gives us what we ask. He did with Habakkuk. God approached the prophet in a vision. He gave the prophet just a portion of a greater view of His greatness and the glory of His plan. And do you know what happened? Habakkuk was ruined!

Habakkuk 3:16a, “I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble...”

This is so amazing! At the start of this prophecy, Habakkuk was burdened by so many things! Yet by the time this short prophecy ended, the multiple burdens of time were lifted from Habakkuk on account of the burden of God, His greatness, glory, and the demand of a life of perfect service! This transformed this strong, confident prophet into a shaking, quivering mess!



We pick up the story of Job well into the book. After years of blessing from the hand of the Lord, Job changed nothing, but then lost everything. This raised a host of questions in Job's heart, most notably, "Is God fair?"

In his arrogance, Job demanded that God come before him and render account for what the Lord had done! Well in chapter 38 God indulged the sinner and so manifested Himself to Job in a way that Job had never seen! He showed him His glory! The result is that Job now is humbled to the dust! Listen to his confession:

Job 42:5-6, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."

Luke 8:22-25, "Now it came about on one of *those* days, that [Jesus] and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, 'Let us go over to the other side of the lake.' And they launched out. [No don't miss it... these are fishermen; to date, Christ had done many things which amazed them, but sailing on water was their domain! So they "launched out" ...] But as they were sailing along [Christ] fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended upon the lake, and they *began* to be swamped and to be in danger. And they came to Him and woke Him up, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' [In other words, *do something!* Their proud confidence had been replaced with the gravity of fear!] And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. And He said to them, "Where is your faith?" [Listen to the disciples' response to Christ's stilling of the storm- it is amazing...] And they were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"

There is no question! After beholding just a little more of the glory of Christ, the disciples were ten times more frightened than they were when facing the storm! *Who is this Man?*

Do you see the temperature to which God heats the forge in which the servant of the Lord is shaped and molded? It is the temperature needed to melt the heart of pride and so the

- Wayward will!
- Fear of man!
- Love of sinning!
- Self-dependence and self-sufficiency!

That is a third element to the process the Lord uses to make a Servant of God!

Now unlike in candy making or sword smelting, the Fahrenheit needed to melt the Christian's heart of pride is unique to everyone! There is no universal temperature!

It's like parenting. There are some children who have a sensitive spirit such that a dour look from the parent is enough to make them cry. But then there are other children... for whatever reason they require much, much more attention. Yet in either case the goal is the same:

Repentance, Maturation, Growth!

So it is with the forging process that God brings each of His children through! Answer from Scripture: Where does God intend to bring you in your walk? Well where did He bring David?

Psalm 32:3, 5b, "When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.... [Then] I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. [Selah]."- this is where God wants us to live- in confession and repentance!...

Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Or how about Paul?

1 Timothy 1:15, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*."

Romans 7:18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is not*."

Then there is Moses. After God "showed him His glory" we read this:

Exodus 34:8, "And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship."

And you know what? Moses never left this place of humility. For of this man we read:

Numbers 12:3, "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."

All of these individuals were not men given to depression. Yet all of them had been placed by God into a Forge heated by the Flames of His Glory to a Temperature which melted their heart and so drove them to a profound sense of their spiritual bankruptcy! Family of God, do you understand the plan that God has for you (a plan that involves your welfare)? It is to:

- Dethrone every false god and idol in your life!
- Confront you with His glory!
- Bring you to the place of mourning over sin- brokenness and repentance!

This is how Spiritual Giants are made!

**End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> There is debate as to the source of the voice. Calvin contends that the voice here came from God. Motyer differs. My comments are based on Calvin's assumption.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Isaiah 15:1; Jeremiah 47:5; Hosea 4:5-6; 10:15.

<sup>3</sup> No doubt the nationalism of Romans 3:17-23 existed in Judah at the time.

## **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on May 27, 2012. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.