

A Gospel Call to Ministry

Isaiah 6:1–8

Introduction

As I've been preparing for this next ministry trip, I've been meditating on the message that I want to preach for Alan's installation, and I decided that I wanted to share that with you all as well. While it's not a message from 2 Corinthians, it is very much in line with the theme of 2 Corinthians—concerning the Christian's call to ministry, both to the people of God in the church and to the lost through the proclamation of the Gospel in evangelism. It's a text that not only *instructs* us concerning our call to Gospel proclamation, but *models* Gospel proclamation for us in a unique way. So turn with me in your Bibles to the sixth chapter of Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 6, God Himself calls the prophet Isaiah into his own ministry of proclamation by revealing Himself *to* Isaiah in an unforgettable, life-changing scene.

Now, just a little background to get us oriented to the text. Isaiah was one of Israel's most notable prophets. Many of the prophets of Israel's history came from humble backgrounds—some were peasants, others shepherds, still others farmers. But Isaiah was different. He was a statesman. His ministry brought him into contact with the royal court of Israel. He was a sort of kingly consultant, and he prophesied throughout the reigns of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in the 8th century B. C.

The setting of chapter 6, our passage this morning, is, according to verse 1: “In the year of King Uzziah's death.” And this time—just as Uzziah was about to die—was a very morally lax and politically unstable time in Israel's history. Uzziah was one of Judah's better kings. 2 Chronicles 26:4 tells us that “he did right in the sight of the LORD” and “continued to seek God.” “And,” the next verse says, “as long as he sought the LORD, God prospered him.” The chapter goes on to record that Uzziah was victorious in battle against the Philistines and extracted tribute from the Ammonites. He had an exemplary military reputation. Uzziah also built towers, fortified borders, expanded agricultural technology, and restored Israel's military power almost to the state it had been in during the united monarchy under King David.

Unfortunately, though, the result of that kind of *national* decadence in Israel was *moral* decadence among the people. They got comfortable. Their king brought the kind of prosperity and peace that lulls fleshly people into self-sufficiency and apathy toward God. Certainly that sounds familiar, doesn't it? And so the first five chapters of Isaiah's prophecy contain denunciation after denunciation of Israel's unfeeling injustice (1:4, 17), heartless, ritualized sacrifices (1:11–14), and adulterous idolatry (2:8). Let's survey Israel's faithlessness just a bit.

Look at chapter 1 verse 4: “Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned Yahweh, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him.” Again, chapter 1 verse 21: “How the faithful city has become a harlot, She who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, But now murderers.” Verse 23: “Your rulers are rebels And companions of thieves; Everyone loves a bribe And chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, Nor does the widow’s plea come before them.” Chapter 2 verse 6, Isaiah speaks of Israel’s being influenced by foreign nations. Middle of verse 6: “...they are filled with influences from the east, And they are soothsayers like the Philistines, And they strike bargains with the children of foreigners.” Verse 7 speaks of their prosperity and military victories: “Their land has also been filled with silver and gold And there is no end to their treasures; Their land has also been filled with horses And there is no end to their chariots.” And verse 8 speaks of their idolatry: “Their land has also been filled with idols; They worship the work of their hands, That which their fingers have made.”

Sadly enough, we find out that Israel’s moral decline was only an instance of their following their king. 2 Chronicles 26 goes on to tell us that Uzziah trusted so much in his own strength for Israel’s prosperity that he became arrogant. He seized the role of the priests and sought to burn incense to Yahweh; and the Law was clear: the king was not to be the priest! And as a result of his brazen pride Yahweh struck him with leprosy (2 Chr 26:21), which he would have until his death, and which many believe to have hastened his death.

And now with their super-king weakened and incapacitated, Judah began to feel the pressure from the Assyrian empire that was growing stronger by the month, and who was setting their sights on plundering God’s rebellious nation. Uzziah’s son Jotham was no match for his father’s military prowess, and so what once was a settled security in their king began to give way to panic in some, and to a morally bankrupt, live-it-up-while-there’s-still-time attitude in others.

And it’s in this historical context that God calls Isaiah into prophetic ministry. In a time when the people of Israel were panicking and fearing attack because of the loss of their fearless king, Isaiah sees a vision of *the King*. And the King of the ages is not sitting on *David’s* throne (like Uzziah would have been); He is sitting on *Heaven’s* throne—lofty and exalted, high and lifted up, and ruling all nations. In a time when Israel faced great national and military instability, Isaiah sees a vision of *Yahweh Tsevaoth*—the Lord of Armed Hosts—God Almighty, Commander of the armies of Heaven.

And what’s fascinating about the way God calls Isaiah—what sets it apart—is that God doesn’t just give him instructions about how to carry out his ministry. Isaiah doesn’t just receive marching orders. Not just a commission. Isaiah receives an intensely personal, unspeakably glorious, divine encounter with Yahweh Himself that changes the whole course of his life and sets the tone of his entire ministry forever. I imagine that in the midst of the moral and spiritual decline of His nation, Isaiah might have been thinking to himself, “How can this corrupt, rebellious, and adulterous people”—whose wickedness we’ve just seen

outlined in detail in chapters 1–5—“how can they become the obedient, clean vessel through which God’s promised blessing can come to the nations?” And God’s response is to invade Isaiah’s world, snatch him up to a vision of the heavenly temple, and say: “Like this.” Rather than simply telling Isaiah what his message to a sinful and idolatrous people will be, God shows him.

What’s astounding about this passage is that God’s call of Isaiah to ministry comes in the form of the Gospel itself. God calls Isaiah to ministry by causing him to experience the drama of redemption in real time. The **four scenes** of Isaiah’s vision of the living God that we see in this text consist of the **four key components** of the Gospel message that *we* have been commissioned to proclaim to our friends, to our neighbors, and to all the nations.

And so as we go through the **four scenes** of this text, I’ll not only preach the Gospel to you so that you can see this text as God intended you to see it, but I’ll also try to comment on how in our Gospel proclamation we ought to proclaim: (1) God’s holiness, (2) man’s sinfulness, (3) God’s gracious provision of atonement, and (4) man’s necessary response to this Good News.

And it’s also my prayer, as we go through these four scenes, that you would see—that you would behold with the eyes of your heart the same magnificent vision of God that Isaiah saw; and that the beauty of His holiness and His grace displayed in the Gospel would **compel** you to the same delightful, life-laid-down **service** of God and those He means to save as it did for Isaiah.

I. God is Sovereignly Holy (vv. 1–4)

Well, just as the Gospel message does, Isaiah’s vision begins with the person and character of God Himself. **Scene number one: God is sovereignly holy.** Let’s look at verse 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.”

A. God is Sovereign

This is a vision of a Sovereign King. Every phrase in this verse serves to enhance this picture of transcendent majesty. We already spoke of the contrast between King Uzziah and King Yahweh. “In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw...*the Lord*.” And notice: that’s not “LORD” in all capitals there. When we see “LORD” in all capitals, the translators are telling us that the original Hebrew has God’s personal, covenant name: *Yahweh*. But this is not *Yahweh*. This is *Adonai*, the Hebrew word for *lord*, or *master*—the one who is in charge. Isaiah is telling Israel, “In the year we lost our great king, the one we trusted in *so* confidently for the past 52 years, I saw *the* King. The Lord. The Master.”

And this King was sitting on a throne—the symbol of all authority, power, and majesty. Psalm 47:7 says, “God is King of all the earth.” And the next verse says: “God reigns over

the nations, God sits on His holy throne.” And He sits “lofty and exalted,” or some translations have, “high and lifted up.” This is the language of exaltation, of transcendence, of veneration. And the train of His robe—symbolizing majesty; pomp and circumstance—fills the temple.

This opening verse of Isaiah’s vision makes it unmistakable. The very first thing that man must come to grips with as he seeks to understand God and His ways—the very first thing that the faithful messenger of the Gospel must proclaim as He evangelizes—is that God is sovereign; that God is King; that God is God, and we are not. He is the King of all creation, and as creation’s Master—as its Lord—He has the authority to do with it what He pleases. And mankind, therefore, as His creatures, are entirely and without exception accountable to this King.

You see, you are not the master of your fate and the captain of your soul! You must give an account. You are not living unto yourself, for your own ends, with no coming reckoning. All people must give an account to this King who sits on the throne, who is lofty and exalted, and whose majestic train fills the temple! Dear friends, this is the God we must proclaim as we take the Gospel to our world—not some sort of impotent, kindly grandfather, but the sovereign King of heaven!

B. God is Holy

But not only is Yahweh sovereign. He is also unutterably holy. In verse 2 we’re introduced to other characters in this heavenly scene. Isaiah tells us that, “Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.”

What are seraphim? Well, the word itself comes from the Hebrew verb *saphar*, which means “to burn.” Literally, these angels who attend to God as He sits on His heavenly throne are *burning ones*. They themselves are pictured as actually being on fire. And that makes sense when we consider that in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, fire is often associated with God’s holiness. The most memorable has to be in Exodus 3, where God comes to Moses in the burning bush. The bush is set aflame, but the fire isn’t consuming it, and so Moses goes over to see what’s going on, and God tells him: “Don’t come any closer! And take your shoes off! The place where you’re standing is *holy*.” Or in Leviticus chapter 10, when Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, decide that it’s OK for them to worship God in their own way. Leviticus 10:2 says, “*Fire* came out from the presence of Yahweh and consumed them.” And what was the response? “It is what the Lord spoke, saying ‘By those who come near Me, I will be treated as *holy*.’” These seraphim—these burning ones—are a class of angels who were fiery guardians of the **holiness** of God.

But even though these seraphim minister day and night in the presence of God, and even though they themselves are ablaze with the fire of holiness—they still have to cover their faces. They have six wings, verse 2 says, and with two they cover their face. As holy as they

are, they can't bear to look directly into the face of God's holiness! Like the sun shining in its full strength, the sight is just too much to bear!

With two other wings they covered their feet. Just as God commanded Moses to take off his sandals at the burning bush, because he was standing on holy ground in the presence of the Lord, so do these angels acknowledge their humility and their creatureliness in the presence of God, by covering their feet. And with the final two wings they flew. The Hebrew term refers to hovering. And earlier in verse 2 it says that they stood above God. This pictures the angels' readiness to be of Yahweh's service. They are waiting on their seated Master, eager for any sort of direction that He might give them.

So these angels are holy, they are reverent, they are humble, and they are obedient. They're also powerful. Look at verse 4. It says that when they speak, the foundations of this heavenly temple shake. These angels are not the cute, chubby toddlers that you put on wallpaper and decorate your bathroom with. These were the blazing-in-fire, high protectors of the holiness of God, with voices like a fighter jet breaking the sound barrier!

But what's most amazing about these seraphim is not what they looked like, or even what they sounded like. The most important, compelling thing about them is what they said. What is the topic of conversation of heavenly servants of God always in His presence? Look at verse 3: "And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.'"

Friends, this is magnificent! This is the focal point of the entirety of Isaiah's encounter of God! In fact, he draws attention to it by using a particular pattern of Hebrew verb forms that set verse 3 apart from all of the verses before and after it. Isaiah designs his language very carefully in order to slow down the narrative and arrest the reader's attention on the angels' song. This is what Isaiah wants us to remember: the content of the angels' worship as they behold the glory of the God, exalted on His glorious throne centers on His holiness. "Holy! Holy! Holy!"

That threefold repetition is extremely significant in the Hebrew language. Not only does it have implications for the Trinity of God, but it indicates the exceeding emphasis the angels are placing on God's holiness. In our writing if we want to emphasize something we might underline it, or put it in italics, or use boldface type. We use underscores, asterisks, and exclamation points. Well the Hebrew language didn't have any of those. When the Jews wanted to emphasize something, they repeated it. For example, at the time of the Babylonian exile, the captain of the Babylonian guard plundered Jerusalem. 2 Kings 25:15 says "he took away...what was fine gold." The phrase that gets translated "fine gold" there, in the Hebrew text is just "gold gold." To emphasize the gold's value, the writer just repeated the word. Perhaps a bit more familiar, Jesus often employed repetition for emphasis when He would say, "Truly, Truly, I say to you..." In other words: What I'm about to say is an important truth.

But the *threefold* repetition is exceedingly rare. The angels do not just call God, “Holy!” They don’t even call Him, “Holy! Holy!” To attempt to capture the fullness of what they see, these angels have to invent a super-*superlative*: God is Holy! Holy! Holy! We have to acknowledge that this is unique. This characteristic of God’s nature, this divine attribute, is what is raised to prominence in the song of the seraphim. The Bible doesn’t say anywhere that God is “Mercy, mercy, mercy.” It doesn’t say that God is “Justice, justice, justice.” It doesn’t even say that God is “Love, love, love.” The one time Holy Scripture gives this kind of emphasis to a particular attribute of God, it is His holiness. One commentator notes that, “God’s ‘name’ is qualified by the adjective ‘holy’ in the Old Testament more often than by all other qualifiers put together” (Motyer, 77).

Well the scene continues. At the calls of the angels, verse 4, it says that the foundations of the thresholds trembled, and the temple was filling with smoke. This is a scene entirely consistent with other times when God’s holy presence is manifest among men. Turn to Exodus 19. After fleeing from Egypt, Moses leads the children of Israel to Mount Sinai, where God Himself will meet them, enter into covenant with them, and give them His holy Law. And it is a scene to behold. Verse 16: “So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.”

Friends, this is the picture of God that God Himself gives to Isaiah so that Isaiah might proclaim who God is to a sinful and wicked generation. I ask you: Is this your conception of God? Have you beheld God supremely as the One who is majestic in holiness? And if you have, do you proclaim Him to your unbelieving friends and neighbors as the God of all holiness—the God of Light, in whom there is no darkness at all? Do you proclaim the absolute standard of God’s perfect righteousness as the ground for fellowship with Him in heaven? Or have you domesticated Him? Have you housebroken God into a god that’s just a little less offensive—a little less imposing than thunder and lightning and smoke!—a little less demanding? Dear friends, the God we worship, and the God we proclaim in the Gospel, is, first of all, the thrice Holy and all-powerful Sovereign Creator of the universe! May we be faithful to proclaim this **sovereignly holy God** as the very starting point of the Gospel that we preach to the world.

II. Man is Hopelessly Sinful (v. 5)

Well if you *have* beheld this God, and have approached Him in the purity of His holiness, what has been your response? What is man’s response to such a vision of God’s glorious holiness? Let’s look at Isaiah’s response, verse 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 **second scene** of Isaiah’s vision showcases his

own sinfulness. Scene number one: God is sovereignly holy. And in the light of that holiness, scene number two: **man is hopelessly sinful**. As Isaiah beholds this magnificent, awful sight of the Lord God in all of the splendor of His majesty and the glory of His holiness, his response is the only appropriate one for a sinner who has just been confronted with the absolute perfection and moral purity of God. He exclaims, “Woe is me! I am ruined!”

This pronouncement of woe upon himself is especially significant, coming from the lips of a prophet. When a prophet had an oracle of good news, a positive message, he would pronounce, “Blesséd!” We see that everywhere in Scripture. Jeremiah 17:7: “Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh.” But when a prophet had an oracle of bad news, of judgment, of condemnation, he would pronounce, “Woe!” Jesus did this in Matthew 23, in that famous section with the chilling refrain: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Isaiah himself did this in chapter 5. Look back at chapter 5 with me. Verse 8: “Woe to those who add house to house...” Verse 11: “Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink...” Verse 18: “Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood...” Verse 20: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil...” Verse 21: “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes...” Verse 22: “Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine...” “Woe to those, Woe to those, Woe to those!” And then Isaiah sees God in His sovereign holiness, and it’s: “Woe is *me!*” As R. C. Sproul puts it, “On the lips of a prophet, the word *woe* is an announcement of doom” (28).

Isaiah doesn’t say, “Oh, what a wonderful day this is!” or “I can’t wait to tell all my friends!” or “This is great! I think I’ll write a book about my *90 Minutes in Heaven* and let everybody know that *Heaven is for Real!*” No, Isaiah sees God in the flaming majesty of His holiness, and he pronounces a curse of death upon himself. You could translate this: “Let me be *damned!*” Jesus is not your homeboy. He’s not your BFF. If that’s the way you relate to your god, your god is not the God of Isaiah 6! When Yahweh of Hosts is seen for who He is, the most righteous man in an entire nation falls on his face and pronounces a curse on himself! The holiness of God isn’t good for sinners’ self-esteem, is it? It ruins people! It bows you to the dust! And if your understanding of God has not done that to you, you have not seen God! And if the person you’re proclaiming the Gospel to hasn’t beheld themselves as ruined in the light of the holiness of God, they have not yet seen God with the eyes of faith.

Pastor John says of the word *woe*: It means “to be annihilated, destroyed, devastated, wiped out, falling apart, coming loose at the seams, disintegrating. ... One glimpse of God’s holiness and the man was a wretch in his own eyes.” Why is Isaiah’s reaction so strong? Verse 5: “Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the *King?!!*” The **hopelessly sinful man** has come into the presence of the three-times-Holy God of the universe! He is a man of unclean lips, and we know that man’s mouth speaks from that which fills his *heart*, Luke 6:45. Unclean lips mean an unclean heart. The dark filth of man’s sin becomes clear in the searching light of God’s holiness.

This response is not unique to Isaiah. Back in Exodus 20 at Sinai, after the people saw God’s presence in the thunder and lightning and smoke on the mountain, they were so terrified by

the holiness of God that they begged Moses to make God stop speaking to them! Job was the same way. After God showed up and rebuked Job for desiring to contend with the Almighty, Job said, chapter 42 verse 5: “I heard about You, but now I’ve seen You. Therefore I *despise* myself. I repent in dust and ashes.”

And turn to Luke chapter 5. Jesus got into Peter’s fishing boat and began teaching the people from the boat a bit offshore. And after He was done He told Peter to let down his nets for a catch. Luke 5:5: “Simon answered and said, ‘Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets. When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.’”

What was Peter’s response? “Hey, Jesus! Thanks for the fish, man! This is gonna go a long way!” No way. Verse 8: “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Jesus had just manifested His glory by performing a miracle before Peter’s eyes. Jesus was revealing Himself to be God in the flesh. And even though it would be a while before Peter understood much of anything, he knew right then that he had just been confronted by the glory of God Almighty, and immediately he was seized with the reality of his own sinfulness, and just like Isaiah he was undone.

Dear friends, do you recognize yourselves in Peter? In Isaiah? Do you know yourselves this way? Do you know yourselves so sinful, that in the pure light of God’s holiness you are absolutely undone? And as you proclaim the Gospel, do you bring the holiness of God to bear on man’s sin? Because that is your task. You are to convict the sinner of His sin before a perfectly righteous God. You are to so preach the holiness of God that the only conclusion that your listener can reach is that they are a worm—a criminal who has offended the thrice Holy God of the universe, and therefore is entirely ruined—entirely undone!

III. God is Unspeakably Gracious (vv. 6–7)

Because—just as the stars of the heavens need the black backdrop of the night sky to shine forth in their brilliance—it is only against the black backdrop of man’s sinfulness that the glory of God’s grace shines in majesty. That brings us to the **third scene** of Isaiah’s call to ministry. Scene number one: God is sovereignly holy. Number two: in the light of that holiness man is revealed to be hopelessly sinful. But, scene number three: **God is unspeakably gracious**. Let’s look at verse 6: “*Then*—meaning: at that moment that I was absolutely undone—one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your [unclean] lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.’”

If you know the horror, and the shame, of being bowed down on your face in the presence of this magnificently holy God because of your hopelessly sinful condition, there are just no words to describe the amazing grace in these two verses! Our sin separates us from knowing

and enjoying and loving our Holy Creator. And *He* takes the initiative in restoring that relationship by providing atonement.

The angel takes the coal from the altar. This is the altar that stood just in front of the Holy of Holies in the temple, and was where sacrifices were offered and the wrath of Yahweh against Israel's sins was propitiated and appeased by the blood of substitutes. And so by using this symbolism, God is connecting the concepts (a) of the atonement, propitiation, and satisfaction required by God, and (b) of the forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation so desperately needed by His people. And when the coal touched Isaiah's unclean lips, the iniquity that left him ruined in God's sight is taken away! The sin that caused him to become undone is forgiven!

The word for "taken away" is the same word that appears in Isaiah 53:4 when Isaiah says that the Suffering Servant *bore* our griefs—to bear, to take them away. Atonement and forgiveness are achieved by *substitutionary sacrifice*. And the word for "forgiven" is the word *kaphar*, which means "to cover," the most common word for atonement in the Old Testament. In fact, it's the word that is used to describe the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*. One commentator explains, "As we speak of a sum of money as sufficient to 'cover' a debt, so [*kaphar*] is the payment of whatever divine justice sees as sufficient to cover the sinner's debt" (Motyer, 78). Another says, the word *kaphar* with reference to sin "signifies to cover it up, extinguish, or destroy it...so that it has no existence in relation to the penal justice of God. All sinful uncleanness was burned away from the prophet's mouth."

This is the Gospel proper! God is holy, man is sinful and so therefore is alienated from fellowship with God, and stands guilty before the Judge of all the earth! And man is helpless to do anything to pay the fine for his crimes before God. But God has acted in unspeakable, sovereign grace! Not at all on the basis of anything in the sinner, God provides the atonement that burns away the sinful uncleanness in man! And He has done so—not by sending a flaming angel with a coal so holy that even the flaming angel couldn't touch it! That would have been enough!

But God out-does even *this* scene of heavenly holiness by sending His own Beloved Son to be born as a man under the Law, to fulfill all righteousness in His perfect life, to bear the sins of His people on the cross, to undergo all of the unmixed fury of the righteous wrath of His Father that burned against us for our sins; to die under the weight of that wrath, and to rise again on the third day victorious over sin and death—so that you and I, men and women of unclean lips and unclean hearts might be cleansed from our filth, might be washed from our sinfulness in the blood of the spotless Lamb of God! Dear friends, God is **unspeakably gracious!**

IV. Response: Man is Delightfully Compelled (v. 8)

And that brings us to the **fourth scene** of Isaiah's vision. What is man's response to the grace of God provided in atonement for sin? Number four: **Man is delightfully compelled.** Look

with me at verse 8: “Then 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!’”

By the way Isaiah responded to the knowledge of his sin, it’s a sound conclusion to say he experienced the gracious gift of repentance. And then, having experienced the grace of God in the cleansing of his unclean lips, for him to say pretty much anything else aside from “Woe is me!” would imply that he had to trust the atonement God provided was sufficient to pardon his sin and to restore him to fellowship with this holy God. And so it is safe to conclude that Isaiah responded to God’s gracious work in **repentance** and **faith**. And that is the response that we must call for as we preach the Gospel. We must call people to repent of their sins and to put their trust in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness.

But because the emphasis isn’t so much on Isaiah’s salvation as his call to ministry, the focus of his response is on his desire to *serve* the Lord. “Here am I. Send me!” And I absolutely love this. Isaiah’s own experience of the Gospel—the awesome revelation of God’s holiness, the miserable condition of his own sin, and the astounding display of grace in atonement and forgiveness—has made him ready to proclaim! Even in the face of a wicked, adulterous generation sold out to idolatry and self-service and corruption, Isaiah was **delightfully compelled** to the ministry of preaching this Gospel that he had experienced as the solution to the great sinfulness of the people of unclean lips.

And when I stop and think about the wickedness of our own generation, the moral apathy and high-handed godlessness that has come to characterize the secular worldview in America—and then when I think about the kind of lifestyle the follower of Christ is called to in serving such a generation, I ask: where is the Church going to get the motivation to do such a thing? Where will she will get the strength to proclaim truth to a society hell-bent on its own destruction?

And this passage gives the answer: We need to be overwhelmed with the reality of the grace of God that has come to us in the Gospel! We need to be ravished by grace! Knowing yourself to be as sinful as Isaiah had known himself to be, and then knowing yourself as purified, forgiven, and justified as Isaiah was, is kerosene on the flame in the furnace of Christian ministry. He didn’t need to be cajoled into anything. Nobody needed to nudge him to get his act together. He was ready. The same was true of the disciples. The Jews commanded them to stop preaching in Jesus’ name, what was their response? Acts 4:20: “We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

In his book, *The Brokenhearted Evangelist*, Jeremy Walker writes, “Only an unusual child who has been given some great gift is able to keep the news, enjoyment, and display of that gift to himself. The first desire of most children who receive a new bike for their birthday is to go out (no matter what time of day it is or how dark and cold it may be outside) and barrel up and down some portion of the road outside (no matter how short that portion may be) just to get to grips with that gift. You can be sure that they will take their gift to their friends; their joy is not full unless it has been shared. The reality of their experience of receiving is

manifested by the way in which they display that gift and their gratitude for it, to anybody and everybody whom they can reach.” Can we know ourselves beneficiaries of this marvelous gift that has come to us in the Gospel, and keep it to ourselves?

Do we know the terror of God’s holiness? The hopelessness of our condition? The matchless grace that cleanses our sin? Then we must be delightfully compelled to go! If we don’t, who’s going to? Who else is going to proclaim the excellencies of the Holy God who forgives sins, if not those who are actually beneficiaries of that amazing grace? The Gospel is *ours* to proclaim, friends! The task of proclaiming forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ and Him alone falls to *us*! We simply cannot be found sitting on our hands!

Isaiah has been undone by the blazing holiness of God as he is confronted by his sin. He is crushed under the weight of coming face-to-face with white-hot moral perfection. And he has been bowled over by the magnificent grace of God in providing atonement *for* that sin. And his response—his first inclination—is to go and proclaim what he’s seen.

And what’s amazing is: the ministry that the Lord Jesus has entrusted to each one of us as ministers of the *New Covenant*, is so much more glorious of a ministry than Isaiah’s! In verses 9–13, after Isaiah volunteers to preach this great Gospel of forgiveness to Israel, God tells him: Nobody’s going to listen. Verse 10: “Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with the hearts, and return and be healed.” Because Yahweh purposed to bring judgment upon His people, the message that humbled Isaiah and brought forgiveness of sins would only further harden this disobedient people. Isaiah’s was a bad news ministry.

But friends, how infinitely more glorious is our ministry! Isaiah’s was a day in which God shut the door of repentance against Judah in judgment. But through the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6 God now declares, “Behold, now is the acceptable time! Behold, now is the day of salvation!” The Lord God has flung the doors of Gospel mercy wide open! And He is calling His sheep into His fold from every tribe and tongue and people and nation! What could possibly be wrong with us, that we could not want to participate in that glorious mission?! To be an instrumental part in the salvation of lost sinners from the terrors of eternal punishment and into fullness of joy and eternal pleasures at the right hand of their Heavenly Father! Brothers and sisters, if you have beheld the glory of God shining in the face of His dear Son, the sheer delight from that vision alone is enough to compel you to delightful service in the proclamation of the Gospel.

But if it doesn’t—if that response is not kindled in us—I see two possibilities. One is that either by sinning, or by failing to behold Him in His Word and in communion with Him in prayer and fellowship with the saints, you have cut yourself off from that vision of the glory of God revealed in the Gospel of Christ and in the beauty of His majesty and holiness. If so, you need to repent of having left your first love, and remember from where you have fallen, and do the deeds you did at first (Rev 2:4–5). The second possibility is that you’ve never

beheld that vision at all; you've never experienced that gracious forgiveness that comes to us in the Gospel of Christ. You stand yet in need of salvation.

Conclusion

Turn with me to John 12. John is commenting on how so many people in Jesus' day were observing these miraculous signs He was performing—exorcisms, healings, food appearing from nowhere!—and yet they were remaining unconverted. And in verse 39 John quotes the final verses of Isaiah 6: “For this reason they *could* not believe, for Isaiah said again, ‘He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.’” Now, catch what John says in verse 41: “These things Isaiah said because he saw *His* glory, and he spoke of *Him*.” Who's the “Him”? It's Jesus!

“In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw *the Lord. Adonai. Kurios*. Sitting on the throne. John tells us that the train of the robe that filled the temple of the Lord was *Jesus'* royal robe! That means that the glorious God of holiness, protected by the ever-burning fire of the seraphim, *left* that glorious throne room to live as a man, among a people of unclean lips! And that man, Jesus, lived a perfect life in obedience to the Father, the life that you should have lived but couldn't live! And He went to the cross to be smitten by the wrath of the God who is a consuming fire. And He died, and was buried, but on the third day rose from the grave, and He is alive today, glorious in holiness, ruling the world from the throne He left!

And because He came, and lived, and died, and rose again, He now comes to touch the unclean lips and unclean hearts of all those who behold the terrible majesty of God, and see the putrefaction of their own sin in the light of that white-hot holiness, and cry out in repentance with Isaiah, “Woe is me! I am undone!”

Sinner, if this vision of the transcendent holiness of God given to us in Isaiah 6 has illumined like never before the reality of your own sinfulness, *turn* from your sin! Look upon this crucified and resurrected Messiah, sent from the throne of Heaven itself, and put your trust in Him to purify you and atone for your sins! If you do that, the Cross of Christ will have become the burning coal that will cleanse you of your sinfulness and will make you fit for fellowship with the thrice-holy God of the Universe! The door of mercy has been flung wide open! He is yours if you'll have Him this morning!

And for those of you who do know Him, those of you whose unclean lips have been cleansed, go out from this place this week and tell somebody about the marvelous grace that is to be had in Christ.