



June 17, 2007

The God Who Can be Trusted

This morning as many of you know is Father's Day. I feel that it's appropriate that we talk about God the Father this morning. In light of that we are going to look at one prophet's experience of God the Father. Our passage today is found in Isaiah Chapter 6:1:8, which read, "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and exalted with the train of his robe filling the temple. 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. And when they were calling to one another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 'Woe to me,' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.' Then one of the Seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying. 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'"

A.W. Toser once wrote in his book called Knowledge of the Holy, "What come into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before objects of adoration and that civilized people are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him. It begins in the mind and maybe present where no overt act of worship is taken place." In our passage this morning we want to get a vision of who God is because that who Isaiah trusted in and worshiped. He saw God for who he really is and

in the context of this passage Isaiah's talking about the key to spiritual transformation is a vision of who God is. Now going to the historical context to understand what was occurring at the time of Isaiah, as many of you know after Solomon's reign the kingdom of Israel was split into two kingdoms the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah. Isaiah prophesied to the Kings of Judah and in this time kings were making foreign alliances with other nations to protect themselves instead of trusting God to protect them as he had promised. You see, God had promised his covenant to Moses that he would protect his people if they merely placed their trust in him and they didn't need to make alliances with foreign nations for protection. Isaiah continually called the people to trust God for protection instead of other things. You, see this chapter fits, in that it gives a basis, an understanding for Isaiah's trust in God.

The literary context, we're picking up in Chapter 6 but Chapters 1-5 detail the sins of the people of Judah and how they are not living as the people of God ought to. In chapter 1:4 Isaiah describes his people as people weighed down with iniquities showing that the people are deeply sinful in their actions and it is a situation where it is impossible for the people of God to be used for God's purposes and to be used for his purposes and for transformation to take place the people need to have a vision of God and to see who God is because they don't understand who God is. As Toser said we must have a true picture of whom God is as well. Idolatry is worshiping a God made of our designs.

Let us turn to the passage that we read this morning and try to grasp some understanding from Isaiah for us. This begins in Chapter 1, which says, "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and exalted with the train of his robe filling the temple." This is the year that the king of Judah dies, and he had reigned for 50 years, which is a tremendously long amount of time for a king to reign. You see, there probably wasn't fear of who would reign next but after a reign of 50 years there would be a little anxiety on the part of the people. God communicates to Isaiah and Isaiah tries to communicate to the people that even though the king had died there's no need to worry because God is THE King. God is enthroned above all, eternal and deathless unlike the earthly rulers. Isaiah is teaching here about God's sovereignty and his transcendence that God is the true King of Judah not whoever would reign next.

Then we move into verse 2 where it says, "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." The Seraphim are angelic beings who worship around God's throne, its remarkable here that even the unfallen Seraphs, these angelic beings who have never sinned even they cover their faces in the presence of the most high God because of his glory and majesty, even these unfallen beings cant look upon him. In verse 3 they call out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory." In the Hebrew language repetition is used to indicate totality so here the Seraphim are trying to express the totality of God's holiness and I think holiness is a word that's used in scripture a lot but we don't quite understand what it means. Holiness denotes God's separateness in His being and his total and unique moral majesty that God is separated from all sin and evil he is exalted as the royal and magnificent king, he is utterly unique and perfect in his moral majesty. None of us can even come close to God's holiness or unique moral majesty; this is what the seraphim call out.

Isaiah then calls out in verse 5, "Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts." Isaiah cries out that he is unclean that when he is confronted and ushered into the presence of God he sees that he is unfit to be in God's presence. Isaiah understands that he cannot praise and serve God as the Seraphim do because in the depths of his being he is unclean just as his countrymen are. In chapters 1-5 he continually called his people sinful and unclean and yet when he's confronted by the presence and the glory of God he sees that he in the depths of his being is unclean. You see because holiness is not measured by comparison to others but the standard of holiness is God himself and that standard of holiness is perfection and Isaiah recognized that this standard for perfection was so far above him no matter how righteous he was that God's holiness was utterly beyond Isaiah's righteousness.

Then he continues in verses 6-7, "Then one of the Seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said 'behold this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.'" Seraphs come and cleanse him because to serve God Isaiah needed to be a clean instrument but it is God that provides

cleansing. The initiative for the cleansing is not Isaiah himself but the initiative for cleansing is heavens. You see the coal that's found in the altar in the temple holds together the ideas of forgiveness, cleansing and reconciliation, which was needed by God's people. Also we see in the beginning of this chapter that God is lofty and exalted but now he comes near enough for Isaiah to hear him. As Isaiah is cleansed he can now speak with God. This cleansing by grace is available for Israel as a whole its not just available for Isaiah but its available for his people. If the people would humble themselves as Isaiah did they would be cleansed as well.

Then verse 8 says, "then 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.'" This is Isaiah's response to the cleansing and to this vision of God he's cleansed purely by the grace of God and because of this Isaiah makes a willing response as a grateful reaction to God's forgiving grace. Grace demands a response we can't merely receive God's grace and continue to live as we have before. Grace demands response and grace demands obedience to God.

What does this passage mean for us today? What is this vision of God that Isaiah had mean for us today? First I want to talk about holiness, in holiness there's a bit of a paradox. First, we are to be holy people, the New and Old Testament continually call God's people to be holy in all manner of living and dealings with others, in our jobs, our meetings, when we're in the car at all times. Holiness means that we need to be set apart from the society around us that we are not to be the same as others who live around us but the measure of holiness is God himself. It is not a cultural standard so we can't compare ourselves to we cant think that we're doing fine because you can look around to the person next to you or the person outside and think that you're doing better than them. The standard of holiness is God himself and so we can't compare our holiness to others the only to compare is to God. Where the paradox comes in is when we become more like Christ and we increasingly more holy we really see how much farther we have to go because we recognize how high that standard of holiness is. That should bring us to humility because we increasingly see that the standard for holiness is perfection, that it is God himself and we recognize that we have a long way to go and that should bring humility to us.

What did that vision of God do for him? It gave Isaiah profound trust in God because he saw God for who he is for how big he is.

God is not some passing fancy, some secret formula we mutter he is the God who knows the end from the beginning who created the universe to whom the nations are but a drop in the bucket. This is the God that Isaiah worshiped and I ask us is that the God we worship? When Isaiah underwent trials and opposition he had endurance and he was able to undergo these trials because he knew who God was and he knew whom he served and he knew how big God was and God is and so he was able to undergo this in his ministry.

But the question you should be asking yourself is what if I don't have a vision like Isaiah did? I think there are a few things that we can do because to be honest I think most of us live in a place where we don't have a vision like Isaiah did where God appears to us. I think one thing we can do is meditate on these truths of God his incomprehensibility is the first thing we see here and that means that God cannot be fully known by us or exhaustively understood by us. God is infinite and we are finite. Even when we get to heaven we will not know everything about God because we are still finite and God is infinite. We cannot exhaustively understand or know who God is. God is not some mathematical formula or some lecture that we can master. We do not master God he should master us.

Then we see his transcendence and I think we forget about this sometimes but God is far greater than anything that he has made, he's far greater than anything else that exists, there is none like him that is what God's transcendence means. But we also have here God's imminence. God's imminence means he is personal and relational. We can't forget this but I think in the church today we often emphasize God's imminence and how personal he is and forget that he is transcendent that he is the God who created all things that he is the God whom we are not even worthy to be in his presence. That's why the hymns that we sang this morning the first one that we sang is "Immortal Invisible God Only Wise", is God is called unresting, unhastening and silent as light.

Another verse says, "To all life thou givest to both great and small and all life thou livest the true life of all we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree and wither and perish but not changest thee." God never changes unlike everything else. These hymns give us a picture of who God is and even in the sermon hymn, "I Sing the Mighty Power of God", I love this hymn because it reveals to us some of God's transcendence his mighty power. Then the hymn we will sing to close with, "O Worship the King", we have transcendence and

imminence and how he wants a relationship with us. The last verse says, “frail children of dust, and feeble as frail in thee do we trust nor find thee to fail thy mercies how tender how firm to the end our maker defender redeemer and friend.” See we have that tension between God’s transcendence and how he is utterly above us yet also his imminence. I like the line where it says, “In thee do we trust nor find thee to fail.” We have to ask ourselves why can we trust in God? That question confronted Isaiah and the people in his time, if we don’t have a vision like Isaiah did or even if we have the rest of the book of Isaiah details why we can trust in God.

One reason is because God alone knows the future. It’s Isaiah 45:21 where he details that where God says to Isaiah, “Declare and set forth your case. Indeed let them consult together. Who has renounced this remold? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I the Lord and there is no other God beside me, a righteous God and a Savior there is none except me.” So one reason we can trust in God is he alone knows the future and he alone has set the future in motion.

The second reason we can trust in God is because he alone created everything. That’s found Isaiah 40:25-26 where God says, “To whom then will you liken me that I would be his equal, “says the Holy One, “Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars the one who leads their hosts by number where he calls them all by name because of the greatness of his might and the strength of his power not one of them is missing.” We have a great picture here of the transcendence of God how he created the stars and leads their host by number.

The third reason we can trust in God is because he alone has acted on behalf of his people. In the time of Israel God acted for his people in deliverance and also for us God has acted for us by sending his son. We have this concept of the transcendence of God but also his relational ability that although God is Father above us he wants to have a relationship with us he doesn’t need to have a relationship with us but he wants to.

One more quote from Toser, “The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian church today is to purify and elevate our concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him and of her. In all her prayers and labors this should have first place. We do the greatest service to the next generations by passing onto them undimmed and undiminished that noble concept of God which we receive from our

Hebrew and Christian fathers of generations past.” You see a low vision of God is what kills the church and what seems to have made the church largely ineffective. See we need to purify and elevate our concept of God and see God for who he really is. Isaiah had a big vision of God and may we and on Father’s day let us remember fathers and mothers to pass on this grand vision of God that we have to the next generation as we have received it from the generation before us from the prophets and the apostles. Isaiah had a big vision of God may we understand and trust in that God that Isaiah saw and worshiped.