

Isaiah 6:6-13

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged." ⁸ Also 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." ⁹ And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' ¹⁰ "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed." ¹¹ Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate, ¹² The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land. ¹³ But yet a tenth *will be* in it, And will return and be for consuming, As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump *remains* when it is cut down. So the holy seed *shall be* its stump."

Let's do a quick review.

Uzziah died. His throne was empty. Isaiah had a vision where he saw a throne that was filled by God. He saw the glory of the place. God was being praised by angels. He saw how pure worship of God looks. The place was shaking and smoking.

Isaiah does what humans do when they confront the true God. They get scared because they see the difference between what we are and what God is. And usually our **moral failure** takes front and center in our minds, because that is the **big obstacle** between us and a relationship with this mighty God. So Isaiah is undone because of His sin. He thinks he is done for.

And that is where our text starts this morning.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar.

Now first off, look at the delivery method. This would have been enough to freak anyone out. This "being" takes in his hand a live coal from the altar. Now, was this coal part of an offering, or was it the fire that the offering would be placed on? We don't know. All we know is that it was hot and that it had come from the altar. Now, what is an altar used for? It is normally used to burn offerings granted because of someone's sin. So maybe that is the point here. Something had to be done about Isaiah's sin problem. Now was this a **specific sin** or a **general heart condition**? We can't tell for sure. But we sure know this was about sin.

Now notice something here. Where did Isaiah ask God for help, for mercy, for forgiveness? He didn't. He just stated his heartfelt condition. He knew one thing. He was a goner if God didn't do something to help Isaiah. That is really the starting place of anyone's salvation. This is the place we must all get to before we can do business with God. We must know that we need God **to do something**. And we must **want** Him to do it. How wonderfully uncomplicated it all is.

God did not make any suggestions on how Isaiah should change his behavior. He didn't lay any conditions down as to what Isaiah must do before God would have relationship with Him. He didn't because God has always known that there is nothing **we CAN do** to rid ourselves of any single sin. Our awareness of need is all that is required for God to move on our behalf. Maybe

Isaiah didn't know what to say. Maybe Isaiah thought he was too undeserving for God to do **anything** for him. Maybe he just accepted his fate. We don't know.

Whatever Isaiah understood, what we see reflects the words of a hymn written by Joseph Hart in 1759:

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you, Full of pity, love and power.

Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome, God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance, Every grace that brings you nigh.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden, Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better, You will never come at all.

Let not conscience make you linger, Not of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requires Is to feel your need of Him.

Lo! th'incarnate God ascended, Pleads the merit of His blood:
Venture on Him, venture wholly, Let no other trust intrude.

I think that poem captures it so well. If you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all. All the fitness he requires is to feel your need of Him.

Isn't that **all of our stories** if we were to tell them. Maybe when we first came to Christ we didn't understand the weight of our sin. But those who are Christ's will have that burden laid on them. If we experience the one true God in any degree, this same thing will happen to us in one form or another. We are not worthy. We cannot be made worthy. And we are completely dependent upon **God doing something for us** because we can **do nothing for ourselves**.

And that is what happens here. Without asking, God sends an angel to meet Isaiah's need. He sends a resource to remove the obstacle Isaiah was facing in His relationship with God.

7 And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged."

Isaiah had said that his sin was in his lips, so on his lips was where the coal was placed. Now, clearly this was not a physical cure. It isn't like this physical coal took care of a spiritual problem. The problem was **a spiritual one** and the cure had to be **a spiritual one**. Coals don't remove sin. Even burnt bulls and goats didn't accomplish that. Only Christ could do that. So this coal had to symbolize something bigger and better. Maybe it was the purity of sacrifice from the altar that was intended in this symbol. After all, that is what it takes to take away our sin. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Whatever the case, this cure was effective. It immediately eliminated the obstacle to Isaiah communing with God. Isaiah could now put that sin aside and enjoy that relationship with God.

Now, would that sinful action or attitude cease to be part of his history? No. When God takes away our sin He is taking away the obstacle of it, the penalty of it, not always the memory of it or the consequences of it. We need to be careful in how we understand God forgiving us and us forgiving one another. Forgiveness does not change **our history**. But it changes **our destiny**. It removes the obstacle to our relationship with God. It removes the sin from the list of charges that God has against us. That list is wiped clean by the righteousness of Christ. And that is more wonderful than anything we could really hope for.

I think that one day our sinful memories will have the sting removed from them. They will be past hurting us. But I cannot imagine the memories completely disappearing. Because without them we would be tempted to forget about God's grace. And I believe that is why sinful saved humans have been allowed to remain in this cursed planet for thousands of years. Every one of us will be our own special tribute to the grace of God. We will all have a story of how amazing Grace saved a wretch like me.

Revelations 21:

3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

That is what we have to look forward to if we are in Christ. We too have had the forgiveness of sin applied to our lives if we are in Christ. The word for purge in our text means to make atonement. That is what Christ did for us.

So we see that **God did for Isaiah** what Isaiah **needed** without Isaiah even asking. We can **assume** that he **wanted** it and **he knew** that **he needed it**. It was very gracious of God to provide it immediately so Isaiah did not have to suffer while he waited for it.

It is important to note here that Isaiah needed to experience this forgiveness prior to what follows for at least two reasons.

First, before we experience God's forgiveness, we are not qualified to be God's servant. Before our sin is dealt with, we cannot accurately represent God. We don't have a message. We don't have a hope. We have nothing to say.

Second, before we experience God's forgiveness, we are not willing or able to serve God for the right reason. Before we understand that our sin is forgiven based on grace, our efforts to serve God are almost always **to impress God**, to **earn something** from God, to **win something** from God. And that is a very bad reason to serve God. It is backwards and it is always ineffective. We need to be forgiven before we have the right reason to serve.

Now, look what happens next. It isn't exactly the way I had always understood it.

⁸ **Also 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."**

Doesn't this look like a conversation being made among superiors? Was it not likely that God the Father and God the Son were having a conversation? It almost looks like a staged act. So Son, what are we going to do about the problem we have with our people? How would you

suggest solving this? A messenger? OK. But who. Who should we send to do this important task? Who can I appoint to this task to go and represent us exactly the way we want to be represented?

It is at this point we hear a small voice from the back of the class. I'm here. I'll go. If I'll do? I have always gotten the picture in the past of Isaiah **boldly and confidently volunteering**, like he was bravely volunteering for a suicide mission that was going to win the war for the good guys. But look at the surroundings.

There are beings flying back and forth. There is so much volume the building shakes. Isaiah is scared out of his mind and thinks **he isn't even going to live through this meeting** because of his sin. His sin is dealt with by a burning coal by a flying flaming one. Now do we really think he confidently volunteers for this important mission? The fact that he even presumes to interfere in this important conversation is amazing.

But here we see it. We see the difference that the forgiveness of sin and the assurance of salvation makes in a person.

Isaiah hears of a need in the kingdom of God, an act of service desired by God. Isaiah has evidently been impacted by the forgiveness of His sin. He knows he owes his whole life to this God who has reached out to meet his need. So he does the only thing he knows to do. It is the only way he knows how to express his appreciation. He says, **how about me? Will I do?** Do you ever look at your heart and know that **you really don't want to meet the needs in the kingdom of God if it costs you too much?** Do you think that selfishly **you really don't want to pay that price?** Why is that? Isn't it because we **fail to appreciate the cost of our own salvation?** Don't we forget the price that was paid for us? Don't we take for granted our state of forgiveness? When we really consider the immensity of the price paid for us, how could we refrain from saying, **"Here am I, send me?"** We allow what I want to be prioritized over what **God wants**. We allow the things of this earth to crowd out the things in heaven.

Again, like Jason VanDorsten preached to us a few weeks ago, everything always comes back to the Gospel. Everything always comes back to the salvation Christ has provided for us.

Issac Watts said it so well:

When I survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride.
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood.
See from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown?
His dying crimson, like a robe, Spreads o'er His body on the tree;
Then I am dead to all the globe, And all the globe is dead to me.
Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Added

To Christ, who won for sinners grace By bitter grief and anguish sore,
Be praise from all the ransomed race Forever and forevermore.

Isn't it that truth which we lack when the response doesn't roll off our lips- Here am I, Send me.

There are a couple of other points to focus on here as well.

Notice that God never even asks Isaiah to take on this job. He doesn't pull him aside and say, hey, I have something really important for you to do. No. Isaiah doesn't even know if he is qualified for the task that God and someone else are talking about. All he knows for sure is that **he wants to**.

It is wonderful when the people of God respond to the opportunities to serve with this kind of reckless abandon and willingness to be spent. All Isaiah had to know is that **this was a task that God wanted done**. Are we that quick to respond when there is a need and we have the opportunity to try to meet it? Do we feel such gratitude in our hearts for the forgiveness that we have received that no price is too great to pay?

Look at the dynamic here. There were no humans to impress. There was no one who was going to **help** in this task that Isaiah knew of. There were no volunteers who were going to help him. There were no authorities besides God who were going to guide his efforts. This ministry of Jeremiah's was motivated **only** by his relationship with God.

That is what our motivation should look like. If our motives require the approval of others, or the recognition of others, or even the appreciation of others, we don't have Isaiah's pure motives. We tend to want to do ministry.... IF. If it pays off, or if it is welcomed, or if it is successful, or whatever other IF. And can we know we are like that most by when those things we want along with our ministry don't happen. We can easily find ourselves angry or hurt or resentful or pouty when the ministry we offered to do for God does not provide for us that which we had hoped.

Imagine what would have happened if Isaiah did his ministry the way we often do ours. Imagine the complaints he would have had. But God, they reject everything I say. They don't take me seriously. They won't let me in their clubs. They won't prioritize my ministry to them. We could go on and on.

That didn't happen because Isaiah was doing this from the position of gratitude for his forgiven state. That is where all pure ministry comes from. It comes from people saved by grace wanting to express appreciation to God for all He has done for them.

You know people like this because they will keep doing the ministry God has given them, even when they meet nothing but resistance, even when it costs them dearly to do it, even when no one will do it with them or even voice appreciation for their efforts.

Look at those things you view as the ministries that God has given to you. Why are you doing them? Is it for God alone? There are a million mixed motives we **can** have. There are a million wrong reasons we **can** have. But there is **only one good reason**. Why are you doing it? If we cannot trace our way back to the gospel as being our motivation, we should stop now, or at least repent of our duplicity. When we do things for God for the wrong reasons, we will always reveal our mixed motives by our reactions when we don't get the payoff that we expect.

Now also notice that Isaiah appeals to God **sending** Isaiah. He says, **send** me. Here we see the right attitude by the servant. From this point on this is not **Isaiah's ministry** that Isaiah is asking God to help him with. It is **God's ministry** that Isaiah has the chance to be a part of. Isaiah doesn't really get a say in what is to be done and how it is to be done. He is a servant and he is taking orders and carrying them out. The will of Him **who sends you** is more important than the will of **the one being sent**. That needs to be understood. Isaiah has accepted that from the beginning. That is how he saw his life and his ministry.

How do we see ours? Do we see ourselves as **ones being sent** into this world? Do we see the **will of the sender** as being more important than ours? What do we do when **our pursuit of happiness** crosses **God's will for our service or sanctification**? Whose will wins? Do we take up the cross, or do we rebel and disobey?

So much of this is best determined, not on the days that all is going well. It is seen on the days when our soul is tormented with hard decisions to make, or hard situations to face, or hard emotions to bear, or hard temptations to resist. That most surely shows us **what we really believe** about whose will is **really most important**. This is where we display if we believe we are sent, or if we are just meandering about on our own accord.

Now let's look at the progression here in Isaiah's life.

First we see that the **earthly king dying** created a dynamic in Isaiah's life where he very much needed a **change in perspective**. This change in perspective was provided **by a vision of God on His throne**. This vision of God on the throne led directly to **Isaiah's despair** about his own spiritual condition. This despair led immediately and directly to **Isaiah experiencing the forgiveness of God**, the grace of God. This experience of God's grace led **to Isaiah's desire to be of service to God**. He now had the proper motivation and the proper status to do the work of God. He could now represent God. Now that he has been forgiven, he can offer his service to God in a way God would be willing to accept. And as Isaiah carries out this service to God he will begin to appreciate the **heart of God facing the rejection of His people**.

There are periods of my life that I couldn't make sense of. But over time I have seen more and more how the progression had to happen the way it did for me to get the points God wanted me to get and to be able to serve him in the positions God has placed me. I believe the same is true of every believer. Your story only makes complete sense when it is God who is telling it. Because only He knows what He intended at each stage of the life.

What a sweet truth we have in knowing that God has our lives in His hands. Even the things we don't understand and don't want are playing a part in his preparation of us for eternity if we are His. We are the only people on earth that can say this. How blessed we are to know that our Savior is controlling everything for our good.

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Now, Isaiah has been prepared. His life is just where it needs to be to receive this call of God. He is ready for service. So does God give Isaiah a work that is going to result in hundreds of saved people? Is he going to be used to win hundreds to the Lord? Surely, isn't that the

important work that God called him to? Surely God would not have invested all He did for a poor payoff would He?

Well how do you read it?

⁹ **And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'** ¹⁰ **"Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."**

What? How does this fit with our view of God? In fact, what does this **tell us about God?**

God is sending Isaiah to a people who will not respond to Him. God is giving this man a ministry to do that will only justify the **judgment** of God. It will not change hearts except to make them harder against God. All it will do is give God more evidence to quote at their judgment that they had every chance in the world to repent but they would not.

Now, could God have changed these people against their will? Of course he could. But he wouldn't. Why? I don't pretend to know how this all works. I would be a fool to be like that. But at the end of the day God **does not want those who do not want Him**. Isaiah is to shine a light. But very few, if any, are going to allow it to light their lives. And everyone who refuses to respond to Isaiah's message are guilty of their sin. They are guilty of rejecting God's message. It is a tragedy. People are responsible for their decisions.

Isaiah is to speak the truth to these people. That will be his ministry. And by doing so, all he will do is harden them to the truth. By doing his job he will make them worse off, not better. We have to understand that sometimes that will be our part to play as well. We want people to come to Christ. We want people to come and fellowship with us in Christ. But sometimes all that our witnessing will accomplish will be to harden those who hear us. It will cause them to **hate Christ more**. Isaiah was not going to encourage people to reject God. As we read the rest of the book we will see him calling on Judah to repent. But the effect will be just as God says. They will become hardened. And they will keep hardening themselves up to the point of judgement.

Isaiah is not going to present **the devil's lies** to these people to harden their hearts. He is going to be **preaching God's truth**. But it will still harden those who are supposed to be God's people.

What does God's word do to us? Does it soften us? Does it cause us to repent? Does it cause us to run to Him? Or does it just make us harder? Do we just determine more to stay on our path?

Also, what do you expect in the ministry that God gave you? Will you keep doing it even if the effects are not what you want to see? Will you represent God, even when doing so makes your life miserable? That is what Isaiah had to do.

And what was Isaiah's response to what God said?

¹¹ **Then I said, "Lord, how long?"**

Isaiah wants to know how long the results will be as God says. How long should he keep at this task while the people continue to reject God? That would be a perfectly normal human response. What is your time table here God? How long? When will this end?

And God tells Isaiah something I am sure Isaiah did not want to hear.

And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate,¹² The LORD has removed men far away, And the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land.¹³ But yet a tenth *will be* in it, And will return and be for consuming, As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump *remains* when it is cut down. So the holy seed *shall be* its stump."

God is basically saying, Isaiah, you are going to preach until the end of Judah as we know it. Your job is to preach to a people who are headed only for judgment. You aren't going to change it. Don't start your day with the idea that you are going to change the outcome. You are not. You will preach. They will be judged. Period.

When you are done this blessed and prosperous land will be desolate. It will be gone. It will be a memory.

Let me ask you. How would you like that job?

I doubt many of us would volunteer for this position. But that is exactly what God is sending this messenger to do.

But God does not leave Isaiah with no hope. Look at verse 13.

¹³ But yet a tenth *will be* in it, And will return and be for consuming, As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump *remains* when it is cut down. So the holy seed *shall be* its stump."

It is very common in scripture for there to be a remnant of faithfulness in every circumstance. God always has His people. There are times when He seems to have **many** faithful people. It **will seem** there are times when He has none. But He always has some. Often even when there appear to be **many** who speak well of God, there are still **only a few** who will do what He says. God always keeps for Himself a faithful remnant. Here God mentions a tenth. One in 10 will be faithful.

The obvious question to ask here is, are we it? Are you it? Are you one of God's faithful? Will you believe what He says and do what He tells you? Are you one of His?

The imagery here is of a tree cut down. A mighty huge tree that has grown and established itself over the years. It is beautiful to behold. But it is full of rot. It is coming down. God will not allow it to stand. And what will happen?

Out of that unlikely surrounding will come up shoots. The true tree will begin again. What church is **supposed to look like** will start again. From the roots of the old wretchedness will come a living and vibrant faith.

God will always have a people. They are often not powerful as the world measures power. They are not wise as the world measures wisdom. They are often not rich as the world measures wealth. They are often the most unlikely lot that anyone would ever guess God would represent Himself with. But they are the church. And God loves them. And they love God.

That is the way that God does things.

So at the end of the day, Isaiah's ministry will appear to accomplish nothing as he watches this mighty tree fall. But up from the stump will come signs of life and God will glorify Himself through them. Sing When I survey.