



Sermon

Called to Obey – Called to Preach

Isaiah 6:1-8, Luke 5:1-11

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This is an amazing passage detailing the call of Isaiah, one of the most important prophets in the history of the Hebrew people. He was a competent, statesman-like figure who prophesied during the time of four kings, whose reigns spanned 90 years. Holding prophetic office that long shows how respected he was. But like the rest of the prophets, Isaiah was under no illusion about how God viewed the behaviour of Judah and Israel.

The first 5 chapters of Isaiah tell how disgusted God was with the nation. 1:7b, *“And he looked for justice but saw bloodshed; for righteousness but heard cries of distress.”* The exile in Babylon is predicted as punishment and the avenging nations are portrayed as being ready to come just with the merest whistle from the Lord’s mouth. (Sheep whistle)

Chapter 6 kicks off the second part of the book. This part gives a sweeping vision of God’s absolute supremacy over the nations of the earth. He is the King. He is the Ruler of nations. He is able to reveal the future and to give instructions about it.

Isaiah’s call opens with this dramatic picture which displays God as high and holy, not just kingly and powerful but holy beyond imagining. In his temple, the throne is high, probably above eye level. His magnificent robe signifying grandeur and glory, cascades down in a train from his shoulders onto the steps and fills the whole temple.

You have seen pictures of royal brides whose dresses are swirled around them, placed by their attendants, covering the platform and the steps. If God’s royal train filled the aisles and covered the seats and the choir area, it signifies that he is a God of incomparable splendour. And the Hebrew verb says “It kept on filling the temple.” The fullness of his greatness and splendour never ends.

A summons and commission from this exalted and holy God was absolutely terrifying to Isaiah. The mighty seraphs who flew over the throne just had to start calling out and the whole building reverberated and shook with the power of their utterance. Imagine earthquake. Imagine fiery altar. Smoke billowing and rising to fill the temple.

Isaiah almost screams out “Woe is me! Most unfortunate of men! I am in deep trouble because I am a man with dirty lips and I live among people who have dirty lips. I cannot cope with seeing the holiness of God. No-one can see the face of God and live!”

He is suddenly aware of how disrespectful, hurtful and careless his words have been. He is suddenly aware that he has chosen to dwell with people who don’t show him up – he has blended in with friends who represent the lowest common denominator. They all have dirty stuff coming out of their mouths too. God says, “Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.” What comes out of our mouths shows us what is in our hearts. The Lord is interested in changing our hearts, not just doing a quick cover-up job with lipstick or a smart suit.

Then one of the mighty seraphs fetched a burning coal and touched Isaiah’s lips, which were instantly cleansed. Listen to how he answers God after this experience: God says, “Here is my message to the people: and Isaiah says, “For how long shall I say this, Lord?”

He is a transformed man. Instead of melting in fear, he is given the ability to do what has been commanded of him. God says, “Jump!” and Isaiah says, “How high?” He’s been touched by a living coal from the altar, that symbol of the place of Jesus’ self-sacrifice. He doesn’t argue with or question God but salutes the Supreme Commander.

What about us? I have difficulty coming to grips with this scenario because I have not seen an amazing vision which brought me to my knees. But I have been given enough insight and understanding through the Bible to know that God is the boss and I am here to obey him. He is not here to be my servant or provide me with creature comforts. Jesus has already served me by his incarnation, but now it is time for me to serve him. This makes me cry out to the Lord as Moses did, “Show me your glory that I may know you and honour you above all else!”

We all need to be in awe of God, but not many people can cope with such a revelation as Isaiah had. I know a man who has. He said he was absolutely terrified when it happened, but is now so changed by it that he can understand how people can die for their faith. Now he has seen the Lord there is no going back to the old life.

This is the God to whom we must give account. When Jesus tells the parable of the talents, he describes the fact that we will give account for our lives.

Isaiah 6:1 shows us that he is the ultimate authority. The throne is his right to rule the world. We do not give God authority over our lives. He has it whether we like it or not. What utter folly it is to act as though we had any rights at all to call God into question! He is the Supreme Court, the High Court, and the Judge. After him, there’s no appeal. God is to be revered, held in honour and awe.

And this is just the beginning of rightly relating to God. Proverbs tells us, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”. That kind of fear is awe and respect, partly because of God’s holiness. The seraphs cry, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. “ Three repetitions means supremely and utterly holy.

He is not holy because he keeps the rules. He wrote the rules! God is the source. Everything else comes from him. When asked for his name in Exodus 3:14, he said, “I am who I am.” His being and his character are utterly undetermined by anything outside himself.

His holiness is his utterly unique divine essence. It determines all that he is and does and is determined by no other person. In the end, language runs out. In one word, “holy”, we have sailed to the world’s end in the utter silence of reverence and wonder and awe. There may yet be more to know of God, but that will be beyond words. Habakkuk 2:20 says. “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”

How do we fit this in with our down-to-earth lives? Well, Simon Peter was a rough fisherman. Jesus did an amazing miracle, causing Peter to catch two big boatloads of fish. He fell at Jesus' feet and said, "Go away from me, for I am a sinful man!" He was overwhelmed with a revelation that the man he was talking to was the Son of God. Peter was overwhelmed at how sinful he was and how holy Jesus was. What was Jesus' response? He did not rub Peter's nose in his sinfulness. He drew Peter's attention off himself and onto the destiny Jesus had for him.

"Don't be afraid. I will make you a fisher of men," he said. That promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost after Jesus had risen. 3,000 people responding to Peter's message is quite a catch! I am sure Peter remembered and thought, "It was worth turning my back on that fishing boat..." Doesn't that give you courage to rise up and follow Jesus? That catch of 3,000 people was on a different plane to the mundane life of a middle-class fisherman.

Peter and Andrew pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Jesus. They even left the huge catch that they had just caught with Jesus' help. They could have looked at that big pile of fish and thought, "I will go and sell these and then follow Jesus." But even something that seems good can be a hindrance to the best. Peter could have been afraid to step out of his comfort zone, but Jesus commanded him, "Don't be afraid."

Jesus is truly awesome in the real sense. Worthy of awe. Worthy of our worship. Worth leaving **everything** to follow Him and discover our true identity and purpose in life. If you have never made the decision to turn your back on the old life and follow Jesus, I recommend it heartily.

To explore these ideas more fully and find out if they are really true, an excellent way to do that is by attending an Alpha course. The next one starts on Sunday 3rd March at 4pm. It will go for 7 Sunday afternoons and will be very family friendly, but adults and children will have their separate group discussion times. Please come and bring friends. Children will be catered for and we will have a great time together.

Why would you bother to play around with a half-hearted response? God says, "You will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with **all** your heart" (Jeremiah 29:12–13).