



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for February 22, 2009
Released on Wednesday, February 18, 2009**

"A Commitment to Change"

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 4.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 6.

LESSON TEXT: Isaiah 6:1–8.

Isaiah 6:1–8

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

6 Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:

7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

LESSON AIMS:

Facts: to analyze Isaiah's divine call to his prophetic ministry.

Principle: to be aware that God can call anyone He chooses to serve Him.

Application: to make believers sensitive to God's call upon their lives for service, and to ask God for guidance in one area where he or she needs to "go" for Jesus.

INTRODUCTION:

It is fascinating to hear how God called different people into His service. In one case the husband was progressing up the ladder in the corporate world, headed for a successful career. His wife was a pastor's daughter and had told him she did not care what he did as long as he was not going to be a pastor. When he sensed the Lord call him into ministry, he had to break the news to his wife. Upon saying to her, "I have something to tell you," she said she already knew. God had prepared her, and she was ready too.

One day a local piano teacher in Iowa stopped at a farmhouse where a young boy lived. He had been in her music class at school, and she sensed a natural talent in him. Her purpose in stopping was to talk to his mother about giving him piano lessons. As a result, he studied piano with her until his graduation from high school. At her end-of-year recitals, he was her most advanced student and played last on both nights of those recitals. He majored in music in college and ministered through music many years in colleges and churches.

Various people in the Bible were called in unique ways and were able to serve God many years. Not all had a joyous ministry. Jeremiah was called the "weeping prophet," and Moses experienced many frustrations with Israel. God may not call people today in the way He called Isaiah, but God still calls.

LESSON BACKGROUND:

Isaiah began his prophetic ministry to the southern kingdom of Judah in about 740 BC. By that time, Judah had been separated from the northern kingdom of Israel for nearly 200 years.

Isaiah lived in an era of rampant sin. The sin of God's people was so great that even the message of the prophet would only increase their lack of perception and understanding (Isaiah 6:9, 10). Great devastation of the land would result from the people's exile by a powerful enemy (6:11, 12). Only a remnant ("holy seed") would survive (6:13).

Isaiah's ministry began right at the time King Uzziah passed off the scene. Uzziah (also called Azariah in 2 Kings 14:21; 15:1; compare 2 Chronicles 26:1) had a long reign of 52 years (792–740 BC; see 2 Kings 15:2; 2 Chronicles 26:3). He was considered to be a "good" king by the biblical writers. However, he did not eradicate the high places where the people offered sacrifices and burned incense (see 2 Kings 15:4).

Uzziah also had a problem of pride (2 Chronicles 26:16–20). Uzziah's pride can be traced to his military might and military success. He had developed a sophisticated system that enabled Judah to field a powerful army. Uzziah successfully resisted all foreign threats of the time (see 2 Chronicles 26:6–15). Perhaps this pride "leaked over" into the people and contributed to their disdain of the one true God.

Although the king's son had been the acting king for some time (2 Chronicles 26:21–23), Uzziah's death was a time of transition in at least a psychological sense. Such a transition can create unrest as people try to take advantage of various opportunities, real or imagined. It was in this context that Isaiah saw the vision of God on His throne.

Lord's Holiness (Isaiah 6:1–4) Exalted Throne

1. What is a theophany, and what did Isaiah see in the one before him (Isaiah 6:1)?

Isaiah's call to service is one of the most unusual recorded in the Bible. What he experienced is referred to as a theophany, an appearance of God in a form visible to the human eye. It came in the form of a vision and was so overwhelming in its presentation of God's holiness that Isaiah was left feeling devastated by his sinfulness. This is a good reminder to us to spend much time in the Word of God learning about Him so that we can gain a realistic view of ourselves.

Here Isaiah points out that *Uzziah* dies in about 740 BC. Thus we are able to date Isaiah's vision rather exactly. The death of the *king* and the changes that this brings

to the nation are critically important. Jotham, Uzziah's son, succeeds his father as king. He turns out to be a "good" king as noted in 2 Chronicles 27. But spiritual corruption pervades Judah, as the larger context of Isaiah makes clear. Most Bible students think this vision occurs when Isaiah goes to the temple to worship on some occasion.

2. What did the position of the throne and the flowing of the train indicate about God?

Isaiah recognizes Yahweh God as his master and *Lord*. He is "the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5, below). The Hebrew text suggests that the Lord is the one who is *high and lifted up*, not the throne. But both are high and lifted up! Isaiah will later describe the suffering Servant with the same Hebrew words, translated as "exalted and extolled" (Isaiah 52:13) and again with reference to God himself as "high and lofty" (Isaiah 57:15).

His train relates to the skirts of God's royal robes. This is the loose-flowing part from the waist down, which fills the temple. This points to the heavenly temple, which somehow has properties of the earthly temple. Since the train fills the temple, the implication is that there is no place for Isaiah to move! All he can do is stand still in reverence and awe.

3. How did Isaiah describe the beings above the throne, and what were they saying (vs. 2,3)?

Isaiah also saw seraphim overhead. He described them as having six wings, with two covering their faces, two covering their feet, and two used for flying.

Certainly the seraphim are designed to revere God and glorify Him. Seraphim seem to be like the angels as described by the book of Hebrews: "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire" (Hebrews 1:7) and "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). As to the number of seraphim present, we do not know. (The Hebrew language makes words plural by adding *-im* to the end.)

They cover their faces with two wings, for the Lord's glory cannot be looked upon directly. They also cover their *feet*, for reasons unknown. They *fly* with one pair of wings, signifying readiness to do the bidding of the majestic king at a moment's notice.

Isaiah's glimpse of the presence of God allows us to realize that He is glorious beyond our imagination. It prepared him for great ministry. Isaiah heard the seraphim above the throne calling, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). The text does not say the seraphim are singing. Rather the idea is that one is calling out to another in an antiphonal manner (see Deuteronomy 27:26).

This is a similar cry to that of Revelation 4:8. We are told that uttering the word "holy" twice in Hebrew indicated the concept of being "most holy." A threefold utterance, then, increases the intensity to the meaning of that which is the highest of the highest. Since human language is not capable of adequately describing the holiness of God, this is the best that can be offered.

The phrase "the whole earth is full of his glory" reminds us that the particulars of creation show us something about God (see Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20). The ultimate manifestation of God's glory is Jesus Christ (see John 1:14). God reveals His glory to His people through Jesus (Colossians 1:27).

4. What effect has God's holiness had upon you? What are some ways you can share that impact with others?

God's holiness should affect us profoundly, compelling us to live holy lives of our own, convicting us of our own sinfulness, inspiring us to delight in His presence. Seraphim could not remain silent after experiencing that holiness, nor should we. God's holiness draws our awe. If our awe does not result in speaking words of edification to other Christians or speaking to the world in evangelism, then perhaps we have not experienced His holiness as we ought. We may not experience God's holiness in the same way that the seraphim did, but we can acknowledge that "the whole earth is full of his glory."

5. How did Isaiah see himself after viewing the vision of God's holiness and majesty (vs. 4,5)?

The awe-inspiring scene of this vision reaches a climax as the *posts* that hold the doors in place begin to shake. It is because of the thunderous sound of praise coming from the seraphim as they cry out one to another! The *smoke* is presumably the smoke from the altar of incense, which in the earthly temple stands just before the Holy of Holies (Exodus 30:6; 40:5). Not only are Isaiah's eyes filled with an incredible vision and his ears reverberating with the sound of praising seraphim, but also his nose detects the familiar aroma of fragrant incense. Isaiah's whole being is shaken by this encounter.

Nothing will make a person more aware of his or her own sinfulness than being in the presence of the sinless, holy God. Having experienced the presence of the Holy One of Israel and knowing the sinfulness of Israel (perhaps the reason Isaiah 1-5 was placed before the call in Isaiah 6), Isaiah becomes acutely aware of his own sinfulness.

Isaiah's Sinfulness (Isaiah 6:5-8)

6. What did Isaiah mean by declaring himself undone?

Here Isaiah expresses a helpless feeling—"Woe is me!" He says *I am undone*. The word *undone* has the sense of "to be destroyed." In other words, Isaiah is saying he is doomed to die!

Isaiah gives three reasons for this conclusion. First, he is *a man of unclean lips*. The lips represent the life of a person. The words that come across one's lips reveal a person's true character (Job 6:30; 27:4; Psalm 12:2; 59:12; etc.). Isaiah cannot stand up to God's holiness.

Second, Isaiah dwells *in the midst of a people of unclean lips*. He knows that his own country and culture are corrupt to the core, and he feels he is part of its sinfulness. Third, his *eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts*. People do not expect to see God and live (compare Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:20; and Judges 13:22).

A true evaluation of one's sinful condition is the beginning of a commitment to God. Without this confession, God cannot work His grace in the life of a servant. "Be merciful to me, Lord, a sinner!"

7. What action occurred after Isaiah acknowledged his sinfulness, and what was this meant to do (vs. 6, 7)?

Any fear or despair Isaiah might have been experiencing was relieved when the angel arrived before him. He was assured at that moment that his lips had been purified, his iniquity taken away and his sin purged. The word "seraphim" means "burning ones." The act of one of them taking a burning coal off the altar and touching Isaiah with it was a meaningful, symbolic gesture meant to communicate the complete removal of Isaiah's unworthiness by burning it all away.

It has already been said that we need to spend much time studying God to help us develop a realistic view of self. We as believers are on a journey of spiritual growth—or at least we should be. The growth comes from a deeper understanding of God, His will, and His ways. We see God as we read the Bible and learn who He is. We see His will as we study more in depth and learn the principles that lie beneath the surface of the text. We see His ways in deeper study yet, getting a more complete understanding from the whole Word.

8. What question did Isaiah hear God ask, and whom did He address (v. 8a)?

Once Isaiah had been cleansed, he heard the voice of the Lord Himself asking who would go and minister on His behalf. The wording indicates that God was speaking to others in His heavenly council. In His use of the word "us" in Isaiah 6:8 we find reference to the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was to the other Persons that the Father spoke, asking who could be sent on Their behalf to carry out Their work.

9. What was Isaiah's response, and how does this challenge us (v. 8b)?

Upon hearing this, Isaiah realized that he was now ready and willing to do whatever the Lord wanted from him. His immediate response, therefore, was "Here am I; send me."

Isaiah's response indicated complete readiness and trust in the One he would serve. It is the response God desires from every one of His children. The Bible indicates that every believer has at least one spiritual gift to be used in God's work. Every believer is to have a realm of ministry or influence where he represents God and seeks to lead others into salvation or deeper understanding of Him. Have we yielded to God's will in what we do for Him?

Isaiah had to be willing to allow God to change him into a usable servant. Sometimes when God calls, He also reveals things in our lives that need attention. Are we willing to let go of our own desires and enter fully into what He wants? Are we willing to let Him make us usable?

CONCLUSION

A Call to Commitment

Isaiah responded decisively to God's call without knowing exactly where the call would lead him. Isaiah immediately found himself thrust into a ministry of futility, preaching to a spiritually deaf and blind people who remained that way after his preaching (see Isaiah 6:9–13; compare Matthew 13:14, 15; Acts 28:26, 27). Isaiah was met with unbelief (Isaiah 7:9–13). Even when there was a certain amount of faith exhibited, human shortsightedness and sinfulness prevailed (see Isaiah 39:8).

Isaiah understood that the true servant of God must be prepared to give his or her life for the larger purpose of God's plan. When the servant (Jesus) comes and gives His life on behalf of the world (Isaiah 53:12), then those who have been forgiven much can respond to God's call, "Here am I, send me!" Indeed, Isaiah never turned back from his commitment.

This should lead us to ask what sacrifices we are willing to make in order to fulfill our Christian vocational commitments. Are we willing to go beyond the limits of human endurance, trusting in the strength of God? When we commit to God's call, there is comfort in knowing that God will provide the resources, strength, and courage to go beyond our natural thoughts and abilities.

Could Isaiah have refused God's call? We don't know. Such a question is dangerous in any case, because it may tempt us to toy with the possibility of refusing God's call when it comes to us. Moses tried at first to refuse God's call. What

if Moses had been “successful” in doing so? God would have found someone else. Would you really want to be the one who said *no* to the God who has said *yes* to you through Jesus?

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** If God is the focus of heaven, He should certainly be the center of our lives (Isaiah 6:1).
- 2.** Reverent and continual service should distinguish our lives as it does the lives of the seraphim (v. 2).
- 3.** We glorify God when we declare His holiness by word and action (vs. 3-4).
- 4.** We see ourselves most clearly when we grasp something of the Lord's holiness (v. 5).
- 5.** Only those who acknowledge Christ's sacrifice can receive God's forgiveness (vs. 6-7).
- 6.** One who knows God's forgiveness will be willing to go wherever He sends (v. 8).

PRAYER

O Lord, please forgive our foolish ways and purge us of our sin. Purify us so that we may respond positively to Your call whenever and wherever it may come. Give us the courage and strength of the Holy Spirit to say, “Here am I, send me!” In the name of our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Heed God’s call.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK’S LESSON:

Next week’s lesson (spring quarter) begins with “**A New Heart.**” Study Ezekiel 11:14-21 in preparation.

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