

Isaiah 6 • Upward, Inward, & Outward

Introduction

Isaiah's name literally means "Salvation of the LORD". And salvation is definitely the overwhelming theme throughout messages communicated through him by God. Chronologically, this is the first book to openly reveal the coming work of the Messiah and, with it, the accompanying work of salvation according to God's way of effecting it. It does not come by going to the temple to make a sacrifice, but as the result of a sincere, transformational encounter with Christ. In this example of Isaiah's own salvation experience, we begin to learn the true nuts and bolts of the process and how it works both individually and corporately. And from this basis we'll better understand the need for the Messiah as further expounded at length in later sections of Isaiah.

¹In 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. ²Seraphim 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. ³And one called out to another and said,

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,
The whole earth is full of His glory."

⁴And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: In many Bibles, it specifically differentiates when "Lord" (literally "Adonai") and "LORD" (His proper name represented by the four letters "YHWH"). What might be significant in Isaiah's use of "Lord" in this particular instance?

A: It most likely indicates that the person of the Godhead upon the throne before him is Jesus the Son rather than God the Father. John specifically informs us in his gospel that Isaiah's vision was of the Son:

*This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" 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." **These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.***

John 12:38-41

Q: What is signified by "the train of His robe filling the temple"?

A: In biblical cultures, the hem of a garment was a symbol of authority, so this would probably speak to the nature and strength of His authority, a particularly powerful vision-statement as it filled the entire temple. It would indicate the Son's connection and role in conjunction with the temple.

Q: How does the fact that this occurs after the death of King Uzziah hint at the way that this might impact Isaiah as far as the overall meaning of the vision?

A: The human view of events and life on earth was stressed and chaotic, a world that seemed to be full of man's violence rather than glory symbolized by the death of the earthly king. But the heavenly perspective, from where Christ's eternal reign is in view, is completely opposite. Seeing Christ as already on the throne is seeing the end result when one day the whole earth will be under His rule and affirming that, in the mean time, everything is still under His control.

Q: Is there a lesson for us in the attitude of the heavenly beings ministering in His presence?

A: Their covering of themselves indicate their proper respect and acknowledgment of God personally while at the same time prepared to minister in any way directed. Their work of ministry is rooted in both a right relationship and right worship.

Q: Is there anything that can be attached to the fact that it mentions that in the course of their ministry they called to each other?

A: It indicates both the public nature of ministry and the unity of its ministers that is supposed to accompany it, in full agreement of what was being said.

*But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was **not yes and no, but is yes in Him. For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes**; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.*

2 Corinthians 1:18-20

Q: And what was the subject matter of their ministry?

A: “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts”. Translators capitalize each “Holy” because it represents each person in the triune Godhead: The Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit. All the doctrines of the Gospel are pure and promote holiness of heart and life and in agreement with God’s holiness.

Q: How does the smoke filling the temple in this vision reflect what we know about smoke in the earthly temple?

A: While we know that God’s glory – His very presence – on the occasions that it occupied the earthly temple was described as a “cloud”, there was actually a commandment concerning the smoke of incense in the inner temple that seems to mirror this heavenly event representing the offerings and prayers that come into His very presence.

“He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, otherwise he will die.

Leviticus 16:13

Q: What is Isaiah’s favorite name for God? (He uses it at least sixty-five times in his book.)

A: “LORD of hosts”. It could be translated “LORD of the armies”, meaning that He is the God of holy warfare, opposing sin and defeating the enemy.

Point: *Isaiah needed to realize that although earthly circumstances appeared bad and beyond repair, even though Israel looked defeated with the death of its king, even though things seemed to be at their darkest, that what he needed to do was lift his eyes to see Christ seated firmly in control on the throne: “The LORD is in His holy temple.” When Isaiah looked upward, he saw the Lord.*

⁵Then 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.”

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me
with a burning coal in his hand, which he
had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He
touched my mouth with it and said,
“Behold, this has touched your lips; and
your iniquity is taken away and your sin
is forgiven.”

[Read v.5-7]

Q: What was Gideon’s response when he came into a personal encounter with the Lord?

When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.” The LORD said to him, “Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.”

Judges 6:22-23

Q: What was Job’s response when he came into a personal encounter with the Lord?

*“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;
Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes.”*

Job 42:5-6

Q: What was Peter’s response when he came into a personal encounter with the Lord?

But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Luke 5:6

Q: What was the apostle John’s response when he came into a personal encounter with the Lord, even very late in his life and after many years of having already served Him?

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Revelation 1:17-18

Q: What does Isaiah’s encounter teach as but one of many examples of what happens when someone actually finds themselves in the presence of Christ?

A: He is instantly made aware not only of the sovereignty and holiness of Christ, but becomes acutely aware of his own sin and unworthiness preventing him from approaching the throne. In such encounters, one’s uncleanness and the need to be made clean becomes such a reality, that one clearly sees that without such it’s inevitable for death to follow.

Q: Why do you suppose Isaiah instantly focused on having “unclean lips” rather than an “unclean heart”?

A: It’s especially poignant for a prophet since communicating God’s Word is a prophet’s primary duty. However, it applies to all of us because, biblically speaking, the condition of the lips mirrors the condition of the heart. Isaiah’s confession is, in reality, about his heart as well.

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“Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

Matthew 15:17-20

Q: Isaiah recognized his sin and, therefore, his need. How does the coal from the altar possibly accomplish this?

A: The altar represents the fact that something needs to be sacrificed to make an atonement for our sin on our behalf. In this case, this is the heavenly altar representing the sacrifice Christ has made. The purifying fire of His sacrifice cleanses on our behalf. (Note: It's interesting that when the Holy Spirit is given at Pentecost that it appears as “tongues as of fire” in Acts 2:3.)

Q: Was this the result of the Seraphim's work? Of what might this teach concerning how ministry for God works?

A: This was **NOT** a work of the angelic being; even he could not pick up the coal from the altar but needed to handle it with the tongs. It speaks of how God sends messengers to accomplish His work and how they convey **HIS** power and authority and not their own.

Point: *When Isaiah encountered Christ, it forced him to look inward and face the reality of his spiritual condition. When true believers have an experience with the Lord, it does not make them proud, but humble. They see the urgent need for spiritual cleansing.*

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

1 John 1:8-10

[Read v.8-13]

Observation: *Note the change in the pronoun in v.8 from “I” to “Us”, a vivid reference to the existence and working of the Trinity.*

Application: **TRUE** worship ought to motivate one to witness and service for Christ. Too many Christians want to hold on to a “spiritual experience” rather than be prepared to go forth and share the Gospel.

Q: Why do you suppose that only now God can use Isaiah?

A: Isaiah is no longer wrapped up in his own needs and desires, but **WANTS** to do the will of God as the result of being cleansed from his sins. Furthermore, he is no longer discouraged by his limited earthly view of things, but knows that Christ is on the throne. Isaiah is now **READY** to do God's work on every level.

Point: *Having looked upward to heaven and transformed by his personal, inward look, Isaiah could now look outward and see and respond to the need to preach the Word of God. One of the sure marks of salvation is willing service for His kingdom.*

⁸Then 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!”

⁹He said, “Go, and tell this people:

‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’

¹⁰Render 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 their hearts,

And return and be healed.”

¹¹Then I said, “Lord, how long?”

And He answered,

“Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant,

Houses are without people

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And the land is utterly desolate,
¹²The LORD has removed men far away,
And the forsaken places are many in the
midst of the land.
¹³Yet there will be a tenth portion in it,
And it will again be subject to burning,
Like a terebinth or an oak
Whose stump remains when it is felled.
The holy seed is its stump.”

Q: If God has angelic beings such as the Seraphim who are ready and willing to carry the Gospel, why not use them instead of man?

A: It's an extraordinary statement concerning God's character and ways that He chooses to use men's lips, which have known and been rescued from sin, to convey His message rather than angelic messengers that have never known such. There is a completely different motivation concerning obedience between the two.

Q: V.9-10 are quoted six times in the New Testament. (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:25-28; Romans 11:8) Is God saying that He deliberately blinds people and condemns them?

A: Not at all. He is stating that the Word of God has a hardening and blinding effect on sinners who will not listen and will not yield. ("The sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay." -- Wiersbe) Note the steps downward taken in John 12:

- They **WOULD NOT** believe. "But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him." (John 12:37)
- They **COULD NOT** believe. "For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again," (John 12:39)
- The result was they **SHOULD NOT** believe. "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." (John 12:40)

Point: We are to preach the Gospel regardless of how others respond to it, knowing that the results are in God's hands, whether for many or for but a remnant. It's interesting to note how this ends in v.13 with the example of the remnant not just as a stump, but specifically mentions "The holy seed is its stump". Contrast this to that which God will later say through Isaiah,

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
Isaiah 11:1

Overall Application

What a difference in Isaiah between what he was upon first coming into God's presence and in his condition as he left, transformed from a spectator to a participant. Isaiah had seen the Lord, seen himself, and seen the need. How is this an example for us today?