

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Vision of God in a Time of Crisis

Scripture: Isaiah 5-6

Code: 80-324

Well thank you for a wonderful time of worship, and now I trust we'll have a great time looking at really one of the monumental portions of Scripture, the fifth and sixth chapter of Isaiah. And I was just reminding myself of the words of the Apostle Peter who in writing his second epistle, chapter 1 verse 12, said, "Therefore I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them and have been established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right as long as I am in this earthly dwelling to stir you up by way of reminder."

And I remember when I was just a young preacher, my father used to say to me, "If you're going to preach an old sermon, at least yell in different places." So I'll try to remember where I yelled last time and yell somewhere else.

This is one of those chapters that is in some ways inexhaustible, chapter 6 and chapter 5, its companion is equally a treasure to us. We live in a time of chaos in our own nation, in our own world. This is clear. Not unlike the time in which Isaiah lived. Isaiah lived in a nation in a severe spiritual and moral crisis. In fact, God had already given Isaiah the message of judgment upon this nation, along with the other preexilic prophets who had been warning Israel that judgment was coming and, of course, it came in the form of the Babylonian army destroying the city of Jerusalem and carrying away the people of Israel captive into Babylon. This was a result of their defiance against God of their spiritual apostasy and their moral disintegration.

Isaiah was watching all of that happening around him. And the question that you might pose as you come to these chapters is this question, "What is needful? What kind of person is God looking for in a time of crisis?" That is what this text tells us.

Let's begin with an understanding of the crisis that existed in the nation by looking at chapter 5. The language here is unique, it is beautiful, it is musical, if you will, for chapter 5 begins with a song. It is admittedly a plaintive song. It is a weeping song. It is a dirge. It is a requiem. It is a sad song. But here's how the song goes.

"Let me sing now for my well beloved, a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard," here comes the song. "My well beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. And He dug it all around, removing its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and hewed out a wine vat in it; then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones." In the Hebrew, beushim, sour, inedible berries. A sad song.

Everybody would understand that in an agrarian culture, you invested everything in the production of your vineyard. You purchased the land. You cleared the stones. You planted the choicest vine. You built the protection around it. You hired the people to care for it with the expectation that it would produce usable grapes. Only to find out that in the end when the harvest came, it produced only beushim, useless sour berries. This is a sad song by anyone's standard in an agricultural society. This is the parable with which our lesson begins, the parable.

But there's more to it. Verse 3 says, "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?" Now we know that this is a very personal testimony given by God about God's own vineyard into which He has made this investment only to have it produce worthless fruit.

What are we talking about here? Let's keep reading. Verse 5, "So now let me tell you what I'm going to do to My vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed. I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste, it will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it."

A fruitless vineyard, it will be destroyed, flattened and cursed. And as I said, this is indeed a sad song. All that investment for nothing. All that investment wasted. Tear down the hedge that was intended to protect it. Break down the walls that surrounded it and terraced it. Trample it down, lay it waste, don't bother to prune or hoe it. Let the briars and the thorns, the weeds come up and let it become bone dry. This is a curse on the vineyard.

Verse 7 tells us exactly who this vineyard is. "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress." That's a Hebrew play on words. He looked for mishpat and saw mispach. He looked for tsedaqah and saw tseaqah. We're talking about Israel. We're talking about God making an investment in this people, only to have this people produce sour berries and to bring upon their heads a curse and the judgment of the vineyard owner who is none other than God Himself.

Let's go back to the beginning a little bit and interpret the language here in light of Israel. "My well beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill." THE most fertile piece of real estate, we are told, on the planet may well be the land of Israel, and in particular the Jordan Valley. God chose the choicest piece of real estate. He dug it all around, removing its stones, can well indicate how God built into the Israelite social structure certain laws and patterns of living that isolated them from the encroachment of the pagan nations around them, dietary laws and customs that we're all familiar with. Removing its stones may well have to do with how God called upon Israel upon the entry into that land to eliminate the Canaanites so that they might be unobstructed in their spiritual development and growth in the

land which God had given to them. He planted that land with the choicest vine, it's not really debatable any more that the Jewish people as such are certainly at the pinnacle when it comes to the noblest strains of human kind. Although they be few in number, they have topped the world in so many fields. He chose a very noble genetic strain of people to plant in this best of all places. He built a tower in the middle of it, may well have to do with Jerusalem, that great parapet, that great hill upon which He built His own temple, that place of protection, if you will. The tower was built in a vineyard, not just to store the implements that were used to cultivate the vineyard but the tower was built in order to watch for enemies because in ancient times if you wanted to destroy somebody, you destroyed their crop and virtually destroyed them.

Digging all around it was necessary to prevent animals from coming in and destroying the crop. Removing the stones was critical in order that the roots might grow freely through the ground and they would take the stones out and turn them into terraces and then they would have levels of the vineyard on the sides of the hill. He hewed out a wine vat. Some scholars say that perhaps we know they had a wine vat to crush the grapes to produce the wine. Perhaps that even speaks of the sacrificial system by which the sins of the people of God were dealt with when the blood was shed.

The point is, the planting of this vine was done with such detail and such care that everything that could possibly have been done was done. There was nothing more that could have been done to insure success. And so you expected to produce good grapes. You expect this people with all the privileges and blessings and protections and provisions that God had given them to give back to God righteousness, to give back to God justice. And so the question is posed then rhetorically in verse 3, "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard." And God is speaking. Judge...you make the judgment, "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?" And anybody who knew anything about vineyards would say, "Nothing." You can do no more than pick the best hill. No more than take out the stones, provide protection, plant the finest vine. Build the tower of protection. Ready the wine vat. You can do no more than that.

Why then when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? And God is forcing the reader here to exonerate Him and to say, "Well, if there's nothing more You could have done, therefore the fault does not lie with You." But nonetheless, they produced what they produced, useless berries. In fact, in the language of verse 7, bloodshed and distress.

So, verse 5 God says, "Let me tell you what I'm going to do to My vineyard." And here is in the imagery of this vineyard another pronouncement of judgment on Judah, on the people of God. "I'm going to remove its hedge, all of its protection I'm going to take away. It will be consumed. Break down its wall, it will become trampled ground, lay at waste, it won't be pruned or hoed, briars and thorns will come up. I will charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." This is the curse of God upon His own vineyard.

This is heartbreaking. This is tragic. And so I say it is an exquisite elegy. It is a plaintive weeping sad

song for the vineyard of the Lord is none other than the house of Israel. Judgment coming on this greatly privileged people, privileged more than any people ever, chosen by God, given the best land and the best social and spiritual structures to guarantee the best spiritual products. And they produced nothing of any spiritual value and had to be cursed.

Starting in verse 8 you go behind the parable and you get a much more specific perspective. For here the Lord sets the parable aside, sets aside the vivid analogy, the imagery, and penetrates to the specific sins that destroyed this people, brought about divine judgment. These sins are identified in each case by the word “woe,” verse 8, verse 11, verse 18, verse 20, verse 21 and verse 22. And with these statements, God penetrates to the specific sins, moving from the general reality that there was no righteousness and no justice but the very opposite of that, bloodshed and a cry of distress, as the land was being morally and spiritually ravaged. He goes behind that and labels the sins that were characteristic of this people.

Let’s begin in verse 8, and we cannot dig too deeply into these but we want you to understand them. Number one, “Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field until there is no more room so that you have to live alone in the midst of the land.”

What is this talking about? Grass being materialism. Grass being materialism, consuming, consuming, consuming, buying every house in sight, every piece of land in sight until you have isolated yourself in the midst of all your own possessions. “Because of this,” verse 9, “in my ears the lord of hosts has sworn, ‘Surely, many houses shall become desolate.’” God says, “I’m going to come in and I’m going to empty those houses. Even great and fine ones will be without occupants. And all that land that you accumulated to become rich, I will curse and judge so that ten acres of vineyard will yield only one bath of wine.” “And a homer of seed will yield but an ephah of grain.” Famine conditions...famine conditions.

Your grass being materialism is leading to judgment. You’re not thinking about anybody but yourself and accumulating everything that you can possibly accumulate.

The second sin is indicated by the second woe in verse 11. Woe means curse, damn, consigned to judgment. It really is an exclamatory expression, hoy...closest perhaps to the English Wow. “Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink, who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them.”

What is this? Drunkenness, alcoholics start drinking in the morning and don’t stop. Verse 12, “Their parties, banquets, are accompanied by lyre and harp, tambourine, flute and by wine. But they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, nor do they consider the work of His hands.” Probably a reference to their own bodies. What is the second sin? Drunken pleasure seeking...drunken partying...drunken dissipation...banquets, music, drunkenness and all that goes with it. They were

guilty of grasping materialism. They were guilty of drunken pleasure seeking.

“Therefore,” verse 13 says, “My people go into exile for the lack of knowledge and their honorable men are famished and their multitude is parched with thirst.” They had so much to eat at their parties, they had so much to drink at their parties, they’re going to have nothing to eat, they’re going to have nothing to drink. In fact, verse 14, “Sheol has enlarged its throat, the grave has enlarged its throat, death has opened its mouth wide without measure. And the mindless merry-makers are going to be plunged into death. And Jerusalem’s splendor, her multitude, her din of revelry, and the jubilant within her, descend into it. The common man will be humbled, and the man of importance abased, the eyes of the proud will also be abased. But the Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment and the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness.” God will be vindicated. “And the lambs will graze as in their pasture, and strangers will eat in the waste places of the wealthy.” The animals, sheep mostly, will roam the empty fields and the wealth will be looted by strangers. Judgment on their drunken pleasure-mad approach to life.

The third woe comes in verse 18, “Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood and sin as if with cart ropes.” This is very vivid language. They had carts, carts were loaded with whatever it was that they were transporting. The cart was then hitched to an animal by cart ropes and the animal would pull the great burden in the cart. The picture here is of those who literally are like beasts of burden, dragging around a wagon-load of iniquity with them. And not doing with any reluctance or any shame, by the way, because in verse 19, “Who say...speaking of God...let Him make speed...let Him hasten His work that we may see it. And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come to pass that we may know it.” That is blatant mockery. You are dragging around a cart load of sin like a beast of burden, parading your sin around and shaking your fist in the face of God and saying, “If You don’t like it, let’s see You do something about it.” Let’s just call this defiant sinfulness...defiant sinfulness.

It reminds me of Earnest Hemingway who fought in revolutions, lived a lecherous evil immoral life, tumbling women here, there and everywhere, shaking his fist in the face of God in defiance, who one day went into a private place, put a gun in his mouth and blew the back of his head off. God is not mocked. It reminds me of Sinclair Lewis who was hailed as a literary genius for his treatment of Christianity in the famous novel Elmer Gantry in which he mocked the preacher of the gospel as a drunken, immoral, gambling fool and fraud. And Sinclair Lewis was given awards and hailed as a literary genius. And the truth is, he died an alcoholic in a third-rate clinic somewhere outside of Rome in complete loneliness and isolation.

To shake your fist in the face of God is a very dangerous thing to do. But that is what they were doing, dragging around their sin proudly as if they were in a parade to show it off and then shaking their fist in the face of God in defiance and saying, “If You don’t like it, let’s see You do something about it.”

The next sin is in verse 20, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light, and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." What is that? Well we already have grass being materialism, drunken pleasure seeking, defiant sinfulness, here is moral perversion. Everything gets reversed. That's what happened in Israel. What was evil they called good. What was good they called evil. What was light they called dark. What was dark they called light. What was sweet they called bitter. What was bitter they called sweet. A complete moral reversal...complete moral perversion.

Another sin in verse 21, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight." Let's call this arrogant conceit...arrogant conceit. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Sometimes I think if I'm going to hear another human opinion, I'll be ill. We have more of them now than we ever had in history because we have more media to distribute them all. Everybody's got the answer to everything. Wise in their own sights. It was so in Israel.

So what do we have? Grasping materialism, drunken pleasure seeking, defiant sinfulness, moral perversion, arrogant conceit, and then finally in verse 22, "Woe to those who are heroes and drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink who justify the wicked for a bribe and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right."

What is this? Well you only need to know two things here. The word heroes in verse 22 and valiant men are two words in Hebrew for leader...for leaders. Your leaders are drunk, your leaders are taking bribes, your leaders have no integrity and have abandoned righteousness and justice, corrupt leadership.

Grasping materialism, drunken pleasure seeking, defiant sinfulness, moral perversion, arrogant conceit and corrupt leadership. These are the specific sins that God identifies as the reason for the destruction of Israel. Do they sound vaguely familiar? It wouldn't be a stretch, would it, to say that we live in a nation that is consumed with its grasping materialism? Has there ever been a society in the history of the world as materialistic as ours? Has there ever been a society more given over to pleasure, madness, partying, drunkenness, drugs? Has there ever been a society more defiant in its sinfulness, more quick to shake its fist in the face of God? Has there ever been a society more morally perverted where marriage is bad and living together is noble? Where a relationship between a man and a woman is only one of many options? Or telling the truth doesn't matter, honesty doesn't matter, virtue doesn't matter, style matters. And has there ever been a more arrogant society of people who have more of their own answers for everything? Has there ever been a culture with more personal opinions given weight and merit? And certainly like many other cultures in our leadership and we find out about it just about every day, don't we? Another corrupt person who lacks virtue, who lacks integrity, who is dishonest, who is hypocritical, who is immoral and those are only the ones that we know about. And some of them are in our government and some of them are in religion. You never pick up a newspaper without reading about the Catholic Church having to pay another \$200

million for the corruption of leadership and its devastating effect on people. It's not just the Catholic Church, it happens among those who claim to be Protestant representatives of Jesus Christ as well.

And I suppose then that leads to this question, which is an obvious question. If God destroyed Israel, a covenant people, for these sins, what hope do we have that we're going to escape? Same God, same standards. And no covenant protection. And America, by the way, has no special claim on God, nor is this a land given to us by God in some covenant promise. In fact, as someone said, if God doesn't destroy America soon, He's going to have to apologize to Israel for all of the judgment that they have undergone.

Well Isaiah has given this message but it doesn't end here. The parable comes first, and then the particulars for which the judgment comes, comes second. And then thirdly, the punishment in verse 24...the punishment. "Therefore," key word, "Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes stubble and dry grass collapses into the flame, so their root will become like rot and their blossom blow away as dust." Boy, that's strong language.

They're just going to be completely consumed like dry grass, like dry rotted root. It's all going to disappear without a trace. Why? Here's the key. Put a little mark by this one, end of verse 24, "For they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel." There it is. Do that and you bring down the judgment of God. Reject the Law of the Lord of hosts, despise the Word of the Holy One of Israel and you will bring down divine judgment. Same God, and God will do what He will do consistently with His own nature.

If you go back to the first chapter of Isaiah for a moment, the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem which he saw during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." The original message that came from God through Isaiah, "Listen, O heaven, and hear, O earth, for the Lord speaks. Sons I have reared and brought up. But they have revolted against Me. An ox knows its owner and a donkey its master's manger. But Israel does not know. My people do not understand. Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly, they have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him."

"Where will you be stricken again as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick. The whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts, and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil. Your land is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. Your fields, strangers are devouring them in your presence. It is desolation as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a watchman's hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah."

And so the prophecy begins with the pronouncement of judgment. In chapter 5 the pronouncement of judgment comes back again. And here is the reason, "They have rejected the Law of the Lord of hosts and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel." That is a deadly thing for a people to do, for an individual to do, and for a people to do as well. On this account, verse 25 says, "On this account, because of what He just said, the anger of the Lord has burned against His people." That's a way of saying God is furious. His face is bright red. "He has stretched out His hand against them and struck them down." And here this looks ahead to the great slaughter that will come. "The mountains quaked, and their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the streets. Even for all this, His anger is not spent, but His hand is still stretched out." Even the terrible destruction of Jerusalem, it came at the hands of the Babylonians in the massive slaughter that occurred, didn't satisfy the anger of God, He wanted the rest of them taken into captivity where they dwelt for at least 70 years.

What is going to be the agent of this judgment? Verse 26, "He will lift up a standard to a distant nation and will whistle for it from the ends of the earth." Like you whistle to call someone, God will whistle and bring this distant nation. "And behold, it will come with speed swiftly, no one in it is weary or stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, nor is the belt at its waist undone, nor its sandal strap broken. Its arrows are sharp. Its bows are bent. The hoofs of its horses seem like flint and its chariot wheels like a whirlwind. It roars like young lions. It growls as it seizes the prey and carries it off with no one to deliver it. And it shall growl over it in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks to the land, behold there is darkness and distress, even the light is darkened by its clouds." Just a horrible picture. Description language of the coming of the great Babylonian hordes who were led by God. God whistled and called them to come to the destruction of Israel.

Put yourself in the place of Isaiah. This is a very, very heavy burden to bear, the burden of this message. Cause Isaiah loved his people. Like any other Jew, he was hopeful for the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and David and His promises through other prophets. This is not what Isaiah wanted to see. This message of doom was not a happy message to give. And it seemed as if everything had gone wrong. Certainly if Isaiah were to have written the history of Israel, he would have written into it a great revival perhaps in the midst of this period of time, before the judgment would ever fall...a great revival under his preaching or Jeremiah's preaching. And the people would have come back to God and been restored and blessed. He wouldn't have seen it happen this way. This is horrifying. This is as if everything has gone bad. And the looming question in his mind as it would be, I think, in my mind is...Wait a minute. Is God still in control? Or has something happened in heaven? What went wrong? What has brought this about? Is God still on His throne? Or had the purposes of God somehow been thwarted and defeated and now God, to protect His own reputation, has to come in, in judgment. Is there another sovereign in the universe somewhere? Is God losing the battle to His adversary?

And with that in mind, you come to chapter 6. Honestly, this chapter could take a diligent study for weeks and weeks, but it's enough for us tonight to capture the essence of it because it's very brief but

very powerful. Verse 1, "In the year of King Uzziah's death." You say, "Is that important?" Well it is if your name is Uzziah, or Mrs. Uzziah, or little Uzziahs.

The year, by the way, was 740 B.C. And you can read about this in 2 Chronicles 26. Uzziah was king 52 years in Judah...52 years. And as long as Uzziah was on the throne, peace prevailed. It was a time of peace in the cold war between Israel and the surrounding nations, a time of great prosperity. Society was flourishing, economics were flourishing. People were happy. They had an appearance of religious interests. The festivals at Jerusalem were still going on. People were going through the religious motions. But all these sins were beneath the surface. But as long as Uzziah was alive, it was like God had put His hand on them and said it's okay. Kind of like having a Christian President. Maybe that is God's hand of blessing on us. And then Uzziah died.

And you know how he died? He got proud. He became so proud that he thought he could step into the role of a priest and God killed him. That's the final straw. Now the symbol of blessing Uzziah 52 years, everybody was very used to him, very comfortable with him, he was like assurance that God was still feeling good about the nation. And then God killed him. And the question then must loom....what is going on?

And so Isaiah goes to the temple in the picture here. And I think it was the right place to go, the message was just overwhelming. And he went to the temple to check in with God. What's happening? And it says, "In 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."

Wow! That's so important. God gave Isaiah a vision...a vision, a supernatural ability to see into the spiritual realm. And what did he see? God, the Lord sitting on a throne lofty and exalted with the train of His robe, His glory, filling the temple. What is this telling us? Nobody has taken the throne from God, okay? God is still sovereign. He is still on the throne.

By the way, in John 12:41 John says, "This was God the Son...God the Son." He saw a vision of God the Son. Comforting because the enemy was on the horizon already. Tiglath-Pileser was on the horizon about to assault and destroy the northern kingdom. Everything looked like it was disintegrating, but God was still there on His throne, high, exalted and all glorious. Not only is He all glorious, but verse 2 says Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, reverence for even angels are created beings and cannot look fully upon the glory of God without being consumed. With two he covered his feet in humility for that place is also the holiest of all holy ground. And with two he hovered like a celestial helicopter in motion, fluttering in space, always in motion, ready to be dispatched instantly into the service of God, to be sent wherever God wants to send them as ministering spirits. There surrounding the throne of God are the angels who worship Him and serve Him. So heaven is in tact. God is on His throne, the angels are there to serve Him and to achieve all of His purposes.

And nothing has happened to God's character either. Verse 3, "One called out to another," this is antiphonal, "One called out to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.'" That, by the way, is the view of God that's the foundation of all Christian experience. God is holy...holy, holy, holy. The Triune God is represented in the triune use of holy...holy is the Father, holy is the Son, holy is the Spirit...holy, holy, holy, a holiness that can't be measured is implied in the repeating that word. He is all holy, consummately holy...that means separate. He is utterly unlike us. He is infinitely unlike us. And so He is still sovereign. He still has the full force of His holy angelic force and He is without error and without flaw, perfectly, consummately and infinitely holy. And the whole earth is full of His glory. That is to say He is the God He's always been, He is the immutable, unchanging, all-glorious holy sovereign God. His holiness is too vast to be measured, but it must be acknowledged.

And at that moment, verse 4 says, the foundations of the threshold trembled at the voice of Him who called out...that's the angels calling holy, holy, holy antiphonally, the whole temple begins to shake and fill with smoke in this vision of Isaiah. Nature, in a sense, is a better interpreter of the majesty of God and nature begins to react, everything begins to shake and tremble and everything is filled with smoke. This is a devastating, frightening thing, reminiscent of Mount Sinai when the mountain shakes and fire comes and smoke and the people stay back in fear and horror. God is threatening. God is consuming. God is judging.

And Isaiah responds. He has seen the holiness of God. Let's call this, if you're keeping a little outline, the presence. From the parable and the particulars and the punishment to the presence, he's had a vision of God. And, folks, I would just say to you, this is the only thing that will anchor your soul in the midst of a time and a world in crisis, to know that God is absolutely sovereign, no one usurps His power, absolutely holy, never makes a mistake, never makes a misjudgment, that His glory is fully intact and infinite. That is to say, He is always immutably who He is. Nothing can change.

But it's an awesome thing to come into the presence of a holy God. I'm convinced that this is the most needful thing in our time is to get a vision of God that has a dramatic effect on you. Not to have a superficial trivial smart-alecky kind of relationship with Jesus, but to get a vision of the greatness and the glory and the holiness and the majesty of God that contains elements of fear and judgment.

And what was the response? The fifth verse, "Then I said," what did Isaiah say? "Wow, this is cool! Wow, now I can go on Christian TV and say I saw God. That will be good." Like those people who said they went to heaven and saw God, went to hell and saw the devil. No, he says this, "Woe is me for I am...in the Hebrew...falling apart, disintegrating." He's just used the word "woe" in the prior chapter six times, he knows exactly what it means. He pronounced six curses on behalf of God on the nation Israel and now on his own he curses himself because...what?...in the presence of God in all His majesty and all His sovereignty and all His holiness and all His glory, he compares himself with God and he knows that he is ruined. He's overwhelmed with his wickedness, sinfulness,

wretchedness. I'm disintegrating, I'm going to pieces. He's like Ezekiel who collapses with a similar vision, or John in Revelation 1 who falls over like a dead person in a similar vision. Or Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration who in seeing the glorified Christ go into a coma, this is the trauma of holiness. It's devastating. God is looking for people who have a vision of Him that traumatizes them with His majesty and His glory and His holiness. He says, "Woe is me, I'm disintegrating." Why? "I'm a man of unclean lips." Really, why does he say that? Because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth...what?...speaks. That's where your sin is most likely to manifest itself most readily, most easily, most publicly. I have a dirty mouth...he says. And somebody is going to say, "Whoa, whoa, you've got a bad self-image, man, you need to get some counseling here. You know, you're never going to make it in life if you go around with a bad self-image, that's a negative confession, friend. That kind of negative confession is going to produce some bad stuff in your life. You don't want to be saying things like that." He's saying, "I'm a man with a dirty mouth,"...not in comparison to the rest of the people in Israel, in Israel as Israel goes, he had the best mouth in the land, he opened his mouth and God spoke. He was the preacher and the prophet. But in comparison to God he is vile and he knows it. "I am a man with a dirty mouth. I live among people with dirty mouths."

Why are you saying this? "For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." I'm not comparing myself with anybody but God. And the devastation is this, if I saw God, God saw me. I saw holiness, He sees sinfulness. I'm doomed...I'm doomed. And so he pronounces a curse on himself. This is the heart of the true penitent. He has seen a vision of the glory of God and he sees his own wretched sinfulness and rightly curses himself.

And then comes the purification. And this is what you have to get to, verse 6, "Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs and he touched my mouth with it." Offfff, you taken your tongs, reaching in the barbecue, taking out a life coal, putting it somebody's mouth? What is that. That's the agonizing painful reality of genuine repentance...genuine repentance...genuine repentance, genuine purging, cleansing is a painful experience but a glorious one. "Behold," says the angel, "this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven"

What kind of person is God looking for in a world of crisis, in a nation of crisis, in a time of crisis? A person who has a vision of His glory and majesty and holiness, the person who is very aware of his own sinfulness, a person who is penitent and broken over that sinfulness and a person who is then touched by the cleansing power of God and forgiven. That coal touching his lips is a picture of atonement, burning away iniquity, purifying, cleansing.

I don't think God's looking for the smartest people, the most brilliant, the most influential, the most educated, the most powerful, the richest. I think He's looking in a time of crisis for the people who are penitent and who are purged. That's salvation. And who have a true understanding of His glory and His holiness and His work. And that's borne out in the final section in verse 8, we'll call it the

proclamation.

“I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send and who will go for us?’” Whom shall I send to this people now? Whom shall I send? Who will go for us, trinitarian talk, who will go for us? “And then I said, ‘Here am I, send me.’” I remember as a kid hearing somebody preach and they preached it kind of like this, “And Isaiah said, ‘Here am I, send me.’”

I don't think so. I really don't think so. I think if it were me at this particular point, having had this terrifying traumatic experience of the power and majesty of God, penitence, brokenness, cleansing, forgiveness, knowing my own wretchedness, having pronounced a curse upon myself for what I am and compared to who He is, Isaiah must have dropped his head and when he heard, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” looked around in his vision, “I'm the only one here. There isn't anybody else. You could send me.” Probably wondering if he could survive such an offer.

I love this, verse 9, he said, “Go, you're My man, tell this people. You go tell them. Go tell them.” That's all the Lord is looking for, someone to go and tell them God will forgive, that God will cleanse, and that God will judge. Go and warn and go and offer gospel salvation. You're My man, I don't need the perfect, I don't need the especially gifted, I don't need the rich and the famous and the influential and the powerful, I don't need that. You're the person I need.” This is the kind of person God's looking for in a world in crisis, a nation in crisis, someone who has been touched and cleansed and is willing to go.

And by the way, when you go, tell this people keep on listening but don't perceive, keep on looking but don't understand, render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and return and be healed. Go and no one will understand what you say, no one will buy into it. Their ears are dull, their eyes are dim, they can't see, they can't hear, they can't understand, they won't return and they won't be healed. Oh, that's a nice sort of send off. And so in verse 11 he said what I would say, “And I said, ‘Lord, how long.’” Like, you know, a week maybe? I mean, if nobody is going to pay any attention to this, what's the point? The Lord said, “No, no, just keep doing it until cities are devastated and without inhabitants, until houses are without people and the land is utterly desolate and the Lord is removed men far away and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.” Just keep doing it and keep doing it and keep doing it and keep warning them and keep telling them that God will forgive, and keep it up until there's no one left to tell it to.

This is kind of the Old Testament great commission. Why would I do that? Nobody's going to hear, nobody's going to believe, nobody's going to see it, nobody's going to understand it, nobody's going to return, nobody's going to be saved. Ah, but finally the promise in verse 13, “Yet there will be a tenth portion in it.” This is the doctrine of the remnant. There's a tenth. Very, very difficult Hebrew verse with a lot of different English translations. The gist of it is there's a tenth, there's a stump,

there's a holy seed. This is the doctrine of the remnant. And so it is today. What kind of people is God looking for? Those who are broken over their own sin, those who are humble, those who are cleansed. And you go and you preach and you warn and you call them into the salvation that God offers and you do it and they don't listen, and they don't listen, and they don't listen. But...God has His chosen remnant. God has His holy seed...the tenth, they're there. And the promise is, He will by your faithfulness bring them in.

This fits so perfectly for us, living in a world in crisis, asking the question...How do we reach this world? What kind of people is God looking for? Broken, those who have a vision of Him as high and lifted up and sovereign and holy and all glorious, those who are lost in wonder, love and praise, those who are raptured by His majesty and His glory, those who know that the vast majority will never hear, and never listen, but that God has His people, and are humbly willing to go even though they know they're unworthy of such a calling. That's us. And God will gather in His own people.

Well, at the heart of this story, at the heart of this section of Scripture is that one moment when the angel comes with the coal and touches the lips of Isaiah and his sins are forgiven...a picture of the atonement. That coal was taken off the altar of sacrifice, pictures a future sacrifice of Christ through whom we have been cleansed and called to this same ministry. As we come to the table of the Lord, let this be a time when you offer your thanks to Him for the sacrifice of Christ, for touching our lips and giving us cleansing and forgiveness.

Father, as we come now to the table, we want to be this people, we want to be Isaiahs, we want to be those who will say, "Here am I, send me, Lord, I'm not worthy, I'm not able, I'm not capable, but I'm willing to be used, even though I know the vast majority will never listen, You have Your people there, if You can use me in some way to reach them, it would be my joy. Here am I, send me." But may we know we can't go until we're cleansed, until we're forgiven. May we come to you then with penitent hearts, broken over our own sin. What a perfect place to do that here at Your table where we remember the cross, a life given for us, the body that was placed on that cross, the blood that was shed in death to be the sin offering in our place, to provide that cleansing. We go from the altar of coals to the altar of Calvary where Christ provided the sacrifice that touched and cleansed us, and we come with thankful hearts.

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