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

War in the Gulf: A Biblical Perspective, Part 4
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-51

1991

Obviously, everybody is focused on the current Gulf War and it has had an immense effect on us in many ways. I've been kind of struck lately by how it has affected our sense of national pride.

There was an awful lot of sort of sullen discontent with America just kind of floating through the last few years. And then we all tuned in on the Super Bowl and the game took second place to Whitney Houston singing *TheNational Anthem*, which somehow created an outburst of emotion that I've never seen the like of in my own lifetime in terms of being enamored with the reality of America. It was overwhelming. And I thought to myself, if Roseanne Barr sung *The National Anthem*there the way she did in San Diego a few months ago, they would have torn her limb from limb.

But it was an amazing, amazing change in just a matter of a few months to this immense outpouring of emotion for America. It's really quite startling to me how all of a sudden America feels so good and everybody is so proud about America.

And if I might address that just ever so briefly, and ask the question why we might rather straightforwardly say that we have become the hero again. And we like being the knight in shining armor. We like being Superman to the rescue. We like being the just protector nation who has moved in against the evil aggressor at some sacrifice, some rather immense economic sacrifice, to say nothing of the sacrifice of some lives; to stop the wicked, evil aggressor Saddam Hussein.

And in the process, the display of power that we are putting on exceeds anything that the world has ever known. This is an immense thing. We have demonstrated more firepower in the first 19 days than in the last 14 months of World War II. We love being the hero. We love being macho. We love rolling to the rescue. We love being the strong and the powerful. And it is a noble thing that we are doing as wars go. We are not the evil aggressor. We are not the wicked, invading, slaughtering nation.

But I think as we look at it, we need a bit of a broader perspective. While it is a noble thing that we are doing, I would fear that it might give us a false sense of our strength, our true strength. Even though we may have greater firepower than the world has ever seen, and more sophisticated technical abilities than any nation has ever possessed. And even though we are, at the moment, king of the hill

and all of that, and I'm thankful for a nation that is willing to bear the sword in just protection as God has designed governments to do, according to Romans 13 and Peter's Epistle.

But this patriotic pride must not be allowed to blind us to our spiritual defection and apostasy. Even though we are fighting a moral war in the sense of defending victims and even though we are fighting it in a moral way in the sense that our troops are conducting ourselves in the most moral way that any troops, certainly in modern history, have ever conducted themselves because they're in a Muslim country where there are no prostitutes and no alcohol or drugs. This is the first time that has happened in this century.

Even though we are fighting a moral war in somewhat of a moral environment, you must keep in mind that the generation of young people fighting it is the most immoral generation in American history. While we may, for the moment, be God's tool of judgment or God's instrument of punishment, I have to think that this is also a wake-up call for us to force us to take a good, hard look at ourselves.

One hundred and fifty years before the Babylonian monarch, Nebacaniser took Judah captive in total devastation, destruction and dispossession of the land; everyone thought Judah was riding high. At that particular time, it was about twenty years before Tiglath-Pileser came down into the Northern kingdom, leading the hosts of Assyria to take them into captivity from which they never returned. And there was a certain smugness about society at that time. In fact, they were very used to great military power.

Turn in your Bible a moment to 2 Chronicles chapter 26, 2 Chronicles chapter 26. A man named Uzziah had come to power when he was sixteen years old, and he was king until he was sixty-eight, so fifty-two years he reigned. But I want you to notice a little bit about the power and the might and the strength of this man and his reign, starting in verse 6 of 2 Chronicles 26. "He went down and warred against the Philistines and broke down the wall of Gath, the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod. And he built cities in the area of Ashdod and among the Philistines and God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians who lived in Gur Baal and the Meunites."

And here was a man who was conquering the Arabs who was having a tremendous, tremendous military sweep through the Middle East. "The Ammonites also gave tribute to Uzziah and his fame extended to the border of Egypt where he became very strong. Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the corner buttress and fortified them. He built towers in the wilderness and hewed many cisterns for he had much livestock, both in the lowland and in the plain. He also had plowmen and vine dressers in the hill country and the fertile fields where he loved the soil.

"Moreover, Uzziah had an army ready for battle which entered combat by divisions according to the number of their muster, prepared by Jeiel, the scribe and Maaseiah, the official, under the direction of

Hananiah, one of the king's officers. The total number of the heads of the households of valiant warriors was 2600 and under their direction was an elite army of 307,500 who could wage war with great power to help the king against the enemy.

"Moreover, Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows and sling stones. And in Jerusalem, he made engines of war, invented by skillful men to be on the towers and on the corners for the purpose of shooting arrows and great stones. Hence, his fame spread afar for he was marvelously helped until he was strong."

Here was Uzziah. Here was a man leading a nation not unlike ours, to tremendous military victories; tremendous domestic strength, prosperity, security. He had a tremendous military career. He was a great king.

In the early years and through the main of his domain, he walked with God. But it was at that very time, at the very time that Uzziah had conquered all that he could see and had given Israel great prosperity internally as well as a strong position with its enemies and they were practically invincible, it was at that very time when the nation had reached the military zenith and immense material prosperity, that along came a prophet.

And a prophet who seemed to be in the vernacular, really off the wall. And this prophet came along to speak a message of frightening judgments. The prophet's name was Isaiah.

And the message that he brought is given for us. Turn in your Bible; we're going to look at it together, Isaiah chapter 5. "It is a warning to a nation in a spiritual crisis, though it is in a domestic and military position of power." And while this does not relate to America directly by way of interpretation, it is a graphic historical lesson. A graphic historical lesson, pertinent to us.

Let me begin with you in the beginning of chapter 5 with what we'll call the Parable. The Prophet says, "Let me sing now for my well beloved a song of my beloved concerning his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. Then he dug it all around, removed 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 and then he expected it to produce good grapes. But it produced only worthless ones."

The Prophet says, "This is a song." What kind of song is this? This is an exquisite elegy. This is a funeral song. This is a plaintive, weeping song. This is a sad song. This is a melancholy song. It's a song about a man who set out to make a vineyard and pick the best place and went through the best process and used the best product and provided the best protection and made the best provision and got the worst results. A sad song.

In an agrarian culture where people knew what it was to invest an immense amount of time and energy and life and fortune into this enterprise and to have it produce worthless things, this would be a heartbreaking experience.

And so you have a parable here. A parable that would be understood by the people to whom Isaiah wrote who were used to doing this or even today it is obvious that in all of the history of Israel, the valleys have been used for grain and the hillsides have been used for vineyards. To put a vineyard on a hillside was a tremendous task. And when it didn't produce, it was a tragedy.

In verse 3, the parable continues. "Now all inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard." Make an evaluation. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I haven't done in it? What else could I have done that I didn't do? Anything?

"And the answer to that rhetorical question is, nothing. Why, when I expected to produce good grapes, did it produce worthless ones?" And the answer to that rhetorical question is, well, it certainly isn't your fault. It certainly isn't your fault. It wasn't anything you did or didn't do.

"So let me tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed. I'll break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste. It will not be pruned or mowed but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it. I'll curse that day. I'll curse it."

What's this talking about? What kind of parable is this? Who's he referring to? Verse 7 explains it. "The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel. And the men of Judah are the delightful plant of which he speaks. And he planted them there and he gave them every opportunity to produce and they didn't.

He looked for justice but behold bloodshed. He looked for righteousness and behold a distressful cry. That, by the way, is a play on words in Hebrew. He looked for mishpath, he found the mispac. He looked for sentica, he found setica. He's talking about Judah, the people of Israel.

With that in mind, go back, for a moment, to the beginning. This is an inter-Trinitarian song between two members of the Trinity, really. The Father and the Son, no doubt. "Let me sing a song for my well beloved. My well beloved has a vineyard on a fertile hill." One member of the Trinity singing a eulogy for the other member of the Trinity over the tragedy of what has happened to the people of God. He gave them land in verse 1 on a fertile hill. Would anyone deny that Canaan was the land of milk and what? And honey. The most fertile piece of earth there is.

In fact, even today, it is acknowledged by the world that the territory between the Mediterranean and through the Tigris/Euphrates valley from the majestic mountains and timber covered slopes of

Lebanon, down to the wealth of Egypt. All of that was in the original promise and now we know its immense wealth. Not only the immense wealth that is in the Mediterranean itself, not only the unequaled, except in the San Joaquin Valley of California, Jordan Valley in terms of producing food. Not only the immense wealth of the Dead Sea, but now we know the real treasure, the black gold oil that is hidden under the ground that has made the Middle East the focus of the whole world.

This immensely fertile place that God gave his people. He dug it all around. What does that mean? That's separation. It could be a mode. In ancient times, it could be some kind of a wall to keep it in. But what it means is that God, when he brought Israel into the fertile land, hedged them in. How did he do it? Dietary laws. Customs. Traditions. Ceremonial laws. Religious statutes. Moral laws. Theology. All of that was to isolate them from easy intercourse with the pagan nations, whom, in fact, were to be the victims of the sword of Israel, weren't they? He wanted them separated and kept away from those which could pollute them.

What does it mean to removing the stones? No doubt an illusion to the dispossession of the Canaanites who were in the land who were to be taken out of the land. He planted it with the choicest vine; I don't think I'd find any argument if I were to suggest to you that the strain of people that we know as Jews is the noblest human vine. The Jewish people, though they be few in number, have marked history with the greatness of their genetic powers. He chose a noble part of the human family.

And he built a tower, perhaps an illusion to Jerusalem; and in it a wine vat, perhaps an illusion to the sacrificial system. And then he expected it to produce good grapes. There, you've got it all. And instead it produced, in the Hebrew, Boosheem, which is a word for sour berries.

And then God says, "I couldn't do anymore than I did. I should have every right to expect good grapes and not sour berries. So I'm going to tear you down. I'm going to tear out your protection; I'm going to smash down the wall. I'm going to lay you waste. You're not going to be pruned or howed; briars and thorns are going to come up. I'll charge the clouds to rain no rain on it. I'm going to put a curse on you."

Now, this is not good news to a nation just beginning to feel the power of its invincibility as demonstrated by the conquerings of its great king. And feeling that because Uzziah was king and had been kind for 52 years, that this was like God's stamp of approval on them.

But in spite of their great military capability and in spite of their great domestic prosperity, there was no justice, but bloodshed. And there was not righteousness but the cries of distress. Spiritually, they were apostate.

From the parable, he moves to what I'll call the penetration and gets very specific in verse 8. And he lists six sin that mark the spiritual life of Judah and I want you to see the parallel with us today and I'm

going to go briefly through these. Number one is in verse 8; "Woe to those who add house to house, join field to field until there's no more room." What do you mean by that? "So that you have to live alone in the midst of the land." He's talking about people who kept accumulating property and accumulating property and accumulating and accumulating and one of the things that they're indicted for by Jeremiah is in their massive thrust of accumulation, they never provided for the Jubilee Year and they never provided for the Sabbath rest, remember that? They kept accumulating and accumulating and they wouldn't let anything go back to its original owner as the Jubilee provided. And they kept amassing it and amassing it and amassing it.

And He says, "You're going to be indicted." The word "woe" means cursed or damned or consigned to judgment for your grasping materialism. Your grasping materialism, does that sound familiar? "You're going to find your great houses," in verse 9, "desolate. And your great and fine houses without occupants."

"And all of a sudden all these fields you've accumulated, you're going to have ten acres of vineyard and you're going to get four gallons out of it. Four gallons of wine are going to come out of your ten acres, that's all.

"And you're going to have a homer of seed that's 48 gallons and all you're going to get is an ephah or about five gallons worth of produce." Those are famine conditions. I'm going to judge your grasping materialism.

The second sin is named in verse 11. "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 and their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute and by wine." What's all that? Well, we'll call it drunken pleasure seeking. Drunken pleasure seeking, this is the Good Time Charlie crowd. This is the Friday Singles Bar bunch.

The characteristic of alcoholics is they drink in the morning and then all the rest of the day, too, and that's what he sees here. People inflamed by alcoholism. Wild parties, the word 'banquet' stretching beyond what we think of as a banquet which is something completely different.

And the lyre and the harp, the tambourine, the flute, the wine, the whole Good Time Charlie party atmosphere and here it comes in verse 12, in the middle, "They do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, nor do they consider the work of His hands." What does that refer to? Their bodies, which God has created. They dissipate their own bodies. You could call it drunken dissipation. Physical dissipation. The second sin of Judah for which they are cursed is the sin of drunken dissipation.

The third one is given down in verse 18, "Woe to those who drag iniquity with the chords of falsehood and sin as if with cart ropes." This is amazing. This is people who just literally carry their sin around in

a big wagon load. They're not ashamed of it, they parade it. This is like a float in the Rose Parade.

They're hooked up to a wagonload of sin and they drag it around as if they ought to parade it. They're putting their immorality on display like notches on their belt and not only is their sinfulness blatant, but in verse 19 it says, "They say let Him," capital H, that is God, "make speed. Let Him hasten His work that we made see it and let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come to pass that we may know it."

What that is saying is alright, God, if you don't like it, let's see you do something about it. This is defiant sinfulness. Like Ernest Hemingway, I remember reading, "shaking his fist as it were in the face of God and said, 'I'm not buying any of that Victorian stuff about biblical morality. I've tumbled my women; I've fought in my revolutions, I've drunk and I'll live my life any way I want.'"

Ten years to the day he wrote that article, by the way, in a national magazine, he put a shotgun in his mouth and blew the back of his head off.

Reminds me also of Sinclair Lewis' great, pompous, braggadocio attitude which surfaced itself in his diatribe against Christianity called *Elmer Gantry*. Few people know that Sinclair Lewis ended up a slobbering alcoholic in a third-rate clinic outside of Rome where he died in total obscurity.

But there are those people who think you can defy God with your sinfulness and parade it. We have that in our culture, is that not true of our society? Sin is not only blatant but they're defiant about it. If God doesn't like it, let him do something about it.

In verse 20, we find the next in the catalog of woes, which are very specifically penetrating behind the parable. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness." And you have to ask yourself the question, if that's not typical for today, we'll call it moral perversion. The reversal of all normal understanding of what is right. People who substitute the dark for the light and the light for the dark.

Once it was good to be against homosexuality. Now it's good to be for it. Everything's reversed. Once, premarital sexual relationships were wrong. Now, all of a sudden, they're right. And marriage is mocked. Everything is reversed. Obviously, Satan would want to do that. He's very successful at it.

Nothing new here where the people in Judah calling evil good, calling good evil; switching the dark from the light and the dark, the bitter for the sweet and the sweet for the bitter. Reversing all values. Do you ever feel like you're just watching that happen all around you? Moral perversion. Defiant sinfulness. Drunken dissipation. Grasping materialism.

Verse 21, another one, 5. "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight." Sometimes I think if I hear another talk show, I'll be ill.

Nobody today is an expert. We've pulled everybody down to the same plain and everybody's opinion is equal to everybody else's opinion. People think they have all the answers, "wise in their own eyes. Clever in their own sight." We'll call it arrogant conceit. This has got to be the most conceited culture that ever existed.

And the last one, in verse 22, "Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine." The word 'heroes', note that. "And valiant men in mixing strong drink." The issue here is drunkenness. But the key is the word 'hero' and 'valiant men'. Both of those words in Hebrew mean leaders. Corrupt leadership. The leaders were corrupted. The people who were supposed to be leading the populous to God were corrupt. And not only was their corruption demonstrated in their personal lifestyle dissipation, but notice verse 23. "They justified the wicked" for what? "for a bribe." They could be bought and they take away the rights of the ones who are in the right. You are watching an entire legal system become so convoluted that you begin to question whether it has the capability to discern what is right and what is wrong. And to make a right judgment.

The leadership is corrupted. Grasping material is in drunken dissipation. Defiant sinfulness, moral perversion, arrogant conceit, corrupt leadership were characteristic of Judah in the moment of their great military power and God was sending a prophet to say, "whatever it looks like on the outside, rah rah the nation and wave the flag. On the inside, you are corrupt. And on the inside, you stand on the edge of judgment."

Punishment is the third major point in verses 24 to 30. I won't take time to go into it. The prophet is specific about a "consuming force" that's going to come and he describes it in graphic terms and literally devastate and destroy Judah. Who did he have in mind? Nebacaniser. And the Babylonian armies.

But they would be doing the work of God for it was God's anger, at the end of verse 25, that wasn't yet spent. Why all this? Verse 24, end of the verse. "They have rejected the law of the Lord of Hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel." They had turned their back on God and His word. We are not a covenant people and if being a covenant people as Judah was couldn't protect them from the judgment of God, what is there to protect us? If we've committed the same sins, then we should accept the same curses.

While, on the one hand on the surface, it looks good for America, the truth is, when God penetrates behind our prosperity and our military might, He finds the same decay that characterized Judah.

Now, with that in mind, in the few minutes I have remaining, I want you to go to chapter 6 and I want to ask a question and then answer it. In Isaiah chapter 6, the question that comes is this: if indeed we are in this time of crisis, and I believe we are, and if we stand on the brink of judgment, and I believe we do; and I also believe that in my lifetime, certainly, and in any lifetime that I have read historically, I have never seen a conflux of so many indicators that we could be near the end, which spells judgment for the ungodly of the whole world.

Since all of that is true, the question comes in chapter 6 as it came then and now, what kind of person is God looking for at a time of great judgment? What kind of person? That's the question for us. I mean, I know there are some people that are just wild about the fact that Jesus might come soon. This is not the time to put your pajamas on and sit on the roof.

What kind of person is God looking for for a time of crisis? Somebody might say, "Well, He's probably looking for intelligent, educated, gifted" - let's find out.

We've come now to a very personal moment for Isaiah. You see, Isaiah was shocked by this message, too. He didn't understand it. It didn't seem right. I mean, with all that God had promised to Israel by way of faithfulness to the covenant, it must have gripped his heart and made him wonder, what's going on here? Is this the right message he gave it? Because it was his duty and his responsibility and he was a faithful and righteous man. And he gave it. But it didn't really make sense. And so he needed some time with God.

And so, in chapter 6 in the midst of this, goes to the temple and he's looking not for the priest but he's looking for God. Verse 1, "In the year of King Uzziah's death," stop there for a moment. You say, is that important? Well, it is if your name is Uzziah. 740 B.C., 52 years after he reigned, at the age of 16 initially and for 52 years everybody thought God's hand of blessing all of a sudden, BOOM! We get this devastating warning, and Uzziah dies. Uh oh. Is God taking his hand off?

You know how Uzziah died? He said to himself, "Boy, I'm something, aren't I? I am something. Look what I have done." And he got so enamored with his capability as a king that he tried to invade the priestly office and God killed him with a disease. So he's dead. And now the king is dead. Doom is pronounced. And Isaiah runs to the temple to check in with God and find out what's next.

So he says, "I saw the Lord." God gave him a vision. Say what's a vision? I don't know. Never had one. Less than a dream and more than reality. He went there and he said, "I saw the Lord. And I saw Him sitting on a throne, lofty and exulted, with the train of His robe filling the temple." This is so good.

He went to see God and he found out that God was still on the throne. It's good, isn't it? Still ruling, still in charge. He wasn't wandering around outside wringing His hands saying, "What went wrong?" He's still in control of it all. He's lofty. He's lofty. He's exalted. And the emanating ____ kind of glory

just fills the place. It's the train of His robe, falls, as it were, into the visionary experience he was having in the temple. There must have been a little sign as _____ as he was glad to find out that with everybody else falling down; God was still in the same place, still in charge. The most comforting reality in all Scripture is that God is sovereign and never steps down from the throne where he rules over everything. Everything. He's no victim, ever.

And Isaiah needed to know that. No matter what happens, God's still in charge.

And not only was God in His sovereign He made manifest and His majesty, but notice verse 2. We'll call this the presence, as he sees the presence of God. "Seraphim, who apparently are angels that guard the holiness of God, 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 or hovered like a celestial helicopter, just hovering over God's throne." I love that.

Somebody suggested that with six wings, two covered the face, that implies an act of worship because even a created angel can't look on the full glory of God without being consumed by it, as Exodus 33 indicates. But with two wings, the feet and two to fly, you have two wings devoted to worship. Two wings over the face in worship; two wings devoted to covering the feet in a mode of worship for the ground of glory must also be holy. And then with two, he flew and someone suggested out of the six, four have to do with worship and two have to do with service; keep your priorities right.

And then these Seraphim have some antiphonal kind of communication. I love this. And it's suggested in Hebrew that it was antiphonal, across and back. "And they are saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory." And now your prophet Isaiah is introduced to something beyond the majesty and the sovereignty of God. He's introduced to the holiness of God, which, of course, is that marvelous, all-surpassing attribute. Wouldn't be much help if He was sovereign and unholy, would it? He is holy, holy, holy. The only attribute of God, by the way, repeated three times. The trihagion the Theologians used to call it. "Holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory."

And here the angels are celebrating the holiness of God. You're saying, "What does holiness mean?" Well, it's the word for separation. His utter otherness. That is his utter separation from sin. This is His absolute righteousness. And so they celebrate His holiness.

And again, just to point out this to you, in any vicissitude of life, in any trial of life, in any trouble of life, in any problem of life, everything that you do to respond to that issue is predicated on your understanding of the nature of whom? Of God. When you understand that you have a sovereign God who rules are and a holy God who never does anything that isn't perfectly righteous, that's the foundation for all your living. And for interpreting everything in history.

"Holy, holy, holy." And how holy is God? Well, we begin to see. Verse 4 says, "The foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out while the temple was filling with smoke." Now all of a sudden "our God is a consuming fire" comes into reality. Hebrews 12:28-29. All of a sudden the fire and the smoke that we also noted, remember now back in Mount Sinai when the mountain was covered with smoke and God, of course, a flaming fire?

And so here we see God in this holy consuming character and we get a definition of holiness. Holiness is not only a separation from sin, but it is a consuming fire that will consume all violations of it. So it's very threatening. It's very frightening. It's very fear-inducing.

The presence of God, then, is the presence of majesty. The presence of God is the presence of sovereignty. The presence of God is the presence of holiness, utter righteousness. And the presence of God is the presence of judgment because that holiness must consume all that violates it.

He sees God. He sees God and what kind of person does God need in an hour of crisis? I believe He needs people who have a true vision of themselves. Well ____ , I'm telling you, when I look at the Church today across America and I see all the gimmickry that's being passed off as representative of a biblical ministry, I grieve in my heart because what the Church in America needs and what Christians need most desperately is to fully understand as much as the human heart is capable and as much as the divine word of God has revealed the nature and character of God. We don't need the fluff. We need to know our God, in the depth of His fullness. So it is on the foundation of the knowledge of God that we can base our reactions to the changing winds of human history.

I'm so glad that I can stand and that the simplicity of my own mind and watch a whole world flying all over the place in disintegration and base my responses, my life and my ministry on the confidence that God is majestically sovereign, that God is absolutely and utterly holy and that God will judge those who violate his law. And will rescue those who are his own.

There was Isaiah; the whole building begins to shake. The whole temple begins to shake. And the smoke is there. This is the vision of God. What was his response? We'll call this little section, the Purification. What was his response? And this, we draw to the heart of it. What did he say? I mean, he just had a vision of God. Now, if he were living today, he'd say, "Hey, I've got to go on Christian TV. I've got to tell about this. I've got to write a book, I've got to - "you know, whatever. "I've seen God." Like the guy who gets on TV and says he's been to heaven and back and then he tells us about heaven.

He didn't say anything like that. He didn't decide that he'd had such an experience that was so absolutely unique, he needed to market it. His response was quite amazing. Verse 5: "Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am (in Hebrew) disintegrating because I'm a man with a dirty mouth and I live among

a people with dirty mouths.'" Wait, wait, wait, wait. You think he knew what he was talking about? You think he understands the word "woe"? He just used it six times in chapter 5. And every time he used it, he meant damn, curse, consign to judgment. He's pronouncing curse on yourself. "He says, 'Curse me, damn me, consign me to judgment. I'm falling apart. I'm disintegrating. Why? Because I have a dirty mouth.' He saying, 'Wait a minute, you've got the best mouth in the land. You're a prophet. You open your mouth, God talks. What are you talking about you've got a bad mouth?' He says, 'Not only do I have a dirty mouth, I live among people with dirty mouths.'"

You're saying, "Why did he pick on the mouth like that?" Because there is no more direct, clear and dominating indicator of the corruption of the heart than the mouth. And that was just a touchstone for the recognition of his own sinfulness. And here the prophet of God is saying, "I'm sinful. I'm vile. I'm worthy only to be cursed." See, this guy's got a bad self-image. We've got to get him some help. This guy needs some counseling. This is no good. You can't be effective with a bad self-image.

By the way, if you get too close to God, He will ruin your self-image. He'll ruin it. He'll really wreck it.

So he cursed himself. You say, well, why do you feel like this? Well, he says at end of verse 5, "My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts. I mean, it's just a question of comparison. If I hang around my friends, I'm okay. If I hang around God under these conditions, I don't measure up."

What kind of person is God looking for at a time of crisis in a nation? He's looking for a person who has a true view of God for who He is and has a true view of himself for who he is, too. He sees God as majestic, sovereign, holy. He sees himself as wretched and sinful, dirty. That's the vision.

And you know, that's a typical vision in the Old Testament. Remember Menoah, the father of Samson who came home and said to his wife one day, "We'll die." She said, "What do you mean, we'll die?" And he said, "We've seen the Lord." Why would he react like that? Because if you see God, God sees you. And if He sees you, He saw all your sin, you're dead. That was Menoah's response.

You see the Lord, you die. You've been exposed and Isaiah knew it. "I've just seen God. I'm finished. I saw Him and He saw me. If He saw me, I'm dead." Do you have that view of God? Or have we reduced God to some anemic kind of wimpy person who tolerates just about anything? No, this Isaiah has a totally crushing and broken sense of his own sinfulness. And this is exactly what Isaiah says God wants, if you go back to the end of the Book, in 66:2, God says, and of course, Isaiah's recording it, "So this one I will look to him who is humble and contrite of spirit and who trembles at My word." Who trembles at My word - that's what I'm looking for. To whom will I look? Somebody who trembles at My word.

Remember, even in the New Testament you see this. Whenever the true believer was exposed to the power and the presence of God, it was a terribly shattering experience. I think of Peter in 5 Luke, you

know, where the Lord says, "throw your net down." They couldn't catch any fish and He pulls the net up and there's so much fish and He knows immediately it's the Lord and what does he say? "Hey, Lord. It's wonderful to see you." Now, he says, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am" what? "Simple man." Why? He knew he was in the presence of almighty God because he had just seen Him control the fish. And all he could think about was this is almighty God and He sees me. He sees me. I'm finished. Go away, I can't take it.

It's reminiscent of the disciples in the boat, it says, "The storm started to - 4 Mark records it as well as other Gospels. "And the storm starts and the boat's knocking all over the place and Jesus is asleep and they wake him and say, 'Don't You care? We're going to drown?' And it says, "They were afraid. They were afraid. And then Jesus went, 'Shhhh!' and the ripples didn't even run to the shore, they just flattened out. Perfect calm." And then it says, "They ewer seethingly afraid." See, what's worse than having a storm outside your boat is Holy God in your boat.

So the point was that Isaiah saw himself for what he was. And then verse 6 says, "One of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand which he'd taken from the altar with tongs. And he touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away and your sins forgiven.'" That must have been a painful thing. Can you imagine taking the tongs and going into your barbeque for a coal and putting it in your mouth? This is exactly what happened.

You see, repentance is painful, isn't it? It's painful. Very painful to be that honest. Very painful. Very painful. James said, in James 4:8, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded." And then he added, "You miserable and mourn and weep and let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom." Very painful.

I was in the Soviet Union a few weeks ago. At the end of preaching a message and it was ten minutes to twelve, I said if anyone wants to repent, that's what they say. They say, "I repented when I was 24. I repented three years ago." They call it repenting.

"If anyone wants to repent, please come to the platform." And I closed in prayer. No fanfare, no music, no nothing. The place was packed. No aisles, they're jammed everywhere and more outside looking in the window than on the inside. And I said, "If you want to come to the front, come. The pastors are here to greet you. That's what they told me to say. And you come and repent."

And these people came weeping. It was amazing. At ten minutes to twelve, they started to come and they had to fight through the crowd. At one-thirty, the last one had come. No songs, no nothing. An hour and forty minutes, these people kept coming. And you know what they did when they go to the platform? The pastor said, "Please kneel." And he took the microphone, put it in their face, under their mouth, and said, "Now repent."

And with tears, person after person after person after person repented and described the sin of which they were repenting. Talk about a moving experience. And it was painful and heart wrenching. Repentance is painful.

What kind of person is God looking for in a time of crisis? Here was a man who had a true vision of God. Here was a man who had a true understanding of his own wretched sinfulness. And here was a man who was willing to have the pain of repentance work in his life.

That leads us to the proclamation and we'll finish. "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom will I send? And who will go for us?'" What is this about? Well, we've got to go reach this generation before the judgment hits. Somebody's got to go. Who are you looking for? Who is there? There's only one person, by the way, in this vision.

So Isaiah didn't have to look far. Then I said, "Here I am. Send me." I don't think he said, like I've heard some people preach, "Here am I! Send me!" I don't think he said that. I think he probably looked around a little bit and said, "Well, uh, ah, nobody else is in here. I'm here. You could send me." You say, well certainly the Lord doesn't want a dirty-mouthed prophet with a bad self-image. Oh, but his theology was so good. He knew God and he understood his sinfulness and he understood the need for repentance and cleansing. What do you think God's looking for? Perfect people?

The Lord said, I love it, verse 9, "Yo, you're the guy I was looking for. Tell this people - What kind of person is God looking for to go to this generation? Not the elite. He's looking for the people who understand Him and understand their own weakness and are willing to be cleansed and to repent of their sin. And that's how you put yourself in the position of usefulness.

"By the way," He says to Isaiah, "When you go, nobody's going to listen." What? This is His ordination? Nobody's going to listen? "No, they're not going to listen. No. They're not going to understand. Their eyes are dim. I made them that way so they won't be able to hear and they won't be able to see. Their hearts are fat, I made them that way so they can't hear you and be healed." What? Then he asked the question I would ask, verse 11, "'Lord, how long do I do that? A couple of days? A couple of weeks?' He answered, 'Until the cities are devastated and without inhabitants and the houses are without people and the land is utterly desolate. The Lord has removed everybody away and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. Do it 'til there's nobody left." What?

"That's right. You're my man. Go preach and nobody will listen. But you keep doing it and you keep doing it and you keep doing it until the last _____ drops or until you're out of here. Just keep doing it.' He said, 'Why?'" Because there's a promise at the end, verse 13.

"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." That's one of the most confusing Hebrew versus in the whole Old Testament and I'm not going to try to unscramble it. I'm just going to tell you what it simply means. What he's saying is, "There's a tenth, there's a holy seed, there's a remnant out there. And they're going to listen."

Remember when Paul Acts 18 says in verse 10 where God says to Paul, "I have much people in that city, go after them. Beloved, the world is headed for judgment," be sooner, probably is sooner than most of us would even imagine. But while most won't listen, God has His holy seed, right? What kind of people is he looking for to reap that seed? People like Isaiah. People like you, if you'll be like Him.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for reminding us that in the moment of our apparent triumph, the seeds of destruction can have worked their way into the very soil of our life. Help us, Father, not to equate our military strength with our spiritual strength, but to realize that this nation is dying in apostasy and defection from Your truth and Your world and it desperately needs faithful people. Lord, do not let us be content to run around in our little evangelical circles but nay, we be out there, though rejected by most, to be used as Your instruments to gather the holy seed for Your glory in Jesus' name, amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).