

October 18, 2020

Altar-ed Living: Isaiah

[Isaiah 6:1-13](#)

Do you all know what this is? (Hold up caricature picture) It's a caricature. This one happens to be of three of my daughters when they were really young. Kind of cute, huh?

Here is another example. (Hold up cartoon Picture of Tom with Beard) This one is a great example that demonstrates the potential of how stunning Tom could look with a beard and all the more reason it needs to be saved. Just how 1 Peter 4:8 reminds us how love covers a multitude of sins, a beard covers a multitude of chins 😊

But here is the thing about caricatures. They often highlight or exaggerate certain qualities or features while oversimplifying others to create a reaction. And while there is enough there to identify or recognize who it is, it is not an accurate or true representation of that person. There is always something that is disproportionate or skewed. Some aspect that is distorted.

And sometimes this can happen with our perspective of God. We are prone to caricature versions of God. I have seen this both in my own personal experience along with conversations with others.

For some that may be a picture of God as the cosmic therapist or divine butler, ready to help out when needed. For others it's God as an angry, overbearing, demanding judge. Or perhaps it's the kindhearted, loving, merciful man upstairs not capable of any wrath or judgement. Then there is the picture of God as the disciplinarian keeping tally of all the wrong we do, always shaking His finger. Or the magic genie God. When we need him then we bring him out. And the list can go on and on.

It is these caricature versions of God that hinder and can keep us from fully experiencing the blessing and life altering, life transforming work God wants to do in our lives.

But as we surrender our distorted, skewed caricature versions of God for the fullness and truth of who God has revealed Himself to be through His Word and in Jesus Christ. He will ALTER us especially as we encounter Him at the ALTAR; which as we have said are those holy places in which we have consciously been in and aware of His presence.

This was Isaiah's experience in his vision of the presence and holiness of God. Isaiah saw God for who God is. Not some caricature version. It was this vision and experience in the presence of a Holy God that altered his life and will also alter our lives.

For Isaiah this happened in the year that King Uzziah died which was a very significant event. King Uzziah was a strong and powerful king. For the most part he was a righteous king and noted as doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. When Uzziah was king there was a sense of peace and protection over the kingdom.

Unfortunately, though, Uzziah's life ended tragically and not on a high note.

We read in 2 Chronicles 26:16- *But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

Which if you didn't know, was a job strictly reserved for the priests.

In response, God afflicted him with leprosy, and Uzziah remained isolated and alone until his death.

So now with King Uzziah dead, fear levels were rising. There was a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty. What is going to happen now? Who would protect God's people?

I imagine Isaiah felt pretty discouraged and even disillusioned at the tragic death of the great wise and powerful King Uzziah. Perhaps wondering where was God in all this? And who then is the king in this world anyway?

Whatever caricature version of God, Isaiah may have had would soon end up being completely altered as he encounters the Holy Presence of a Holy God.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Isaiah sees God for who God is. Where is God in all of the uncertainty? God is still in control and seated on the throne. Who is the king? God is the King. God is still in charge and His glory fills the whole earth.

When Isaiah saw God for who God really is and with more clarity than ever before we see at least three things happen that alter Isaiah's life forever.

The first thing is Isaiah saw himself. His true self.

As the Seraphim angels called out: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah is overwhelmed with the realization he is in the presence of a holy and righteous God.

The fact that Holy is repeated 3 times here is declaring the truth that God's holiness is the highest possible degree.

As one commentator puts says it:

“God's holiness is a part of everything God is and does. God's power is a holy power. God's love is a holy love. God's wisdom is a holy wisdom. God's justice is holy justice. Holiness is not an aspect of God's personality; it is one characteristic of His entire Being.”

It is the character of God and not a caricature of God.

Seeing and experiencing this with clarity and in comparison to how sinful and unclean he is, all Isaiah can do is cry out: “Woe to me, I am ruined!”

Aware of his own sinfulness in the presence of all that is holy, Isaiah was wrecked.

When we experience the presence of God and see with clarity His glory and holiness, we can't help but face the overwhelming reality of our own sin and uncleanness.

But thank God that is not where Isaiah's or our experience ends. We are not stuck in our guilt and brokenness. We are not crushed by the weight of our sin. We are not forever separated from God.

Which brings us to the second thing that happened to Isaiah. Isaiah saw and received God's grace and forgiveness.

When Isaiah experiences God's presence he was overwhelmed and utterly wrecked. But it was this clarity and the life-altering presence of a holy, loving, and just God that brought Isaiah to a place of surrender, a place of confession, and a place where Isaiah saw and received God's grace and forgiveness.

The same is true for us. When we experience the presence of a Holy God, our sin is exposed, and we can choose to either ignore it or acknowledge it and confess it. When we come to a place of surrender and confession, we see that we are not ruined, we are not cast off or forsaken, but instead we see and experience God's grace and forgiveness in Jesus who died for us and rose for us and is our salvation.

Just like the words of assurance we are reminded of from 1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us or cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In this Isaiah passage we also see another truth of the character of God in that God initiates and pursues us. God wasn't just waiting around for Isaiah to come to Him but it was God who initiated and drew Isaiah into His presence.

It was God who initiated in providing the way of forgiveness or cleansing. We read here the cleansing came from the altar. For us, the sacrifice and the altar is Jesus. Forgiveness and atonement was available to Isaiah, as it is to us and the whole world, through Jesus.

1 John 2:2 says: *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Have we or are we experiencing God's presence? Have we seen and experienced the love and grace of God who forgives and cleanses us of our sins through our savior Jesus Christ? If not God has already initiated and is inviting you to experience His life altering presence. How will you respond?

The third thing that happened to Isaiah was he saw the heart of God and responded to the invitation to serve and share the life-altering message of hope and salvation to the world.

The heart of God is that He cares about and loves the world and desires for all to be saved. God is always inviting faithful obedient servants to tell of His love and salvation. As God alters our lives, our response should be to want to serve Him and share the gospel with others.

Jesus gives the same message and command to all his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

For Isaiah, after seeing and receiving God's grace and forgiveness after thinking he was totally ruined, he can't help but respond with an eager willingness to serve the King, the Lord Almighty.

So when God asks: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

With immediacy and enthusiasm Isaiah responds, "Here am I. Send me!"

And ya know it would be nice to just end here. A call to serve, and a wonderful picture of an altered life ready and willing.

But unfortunately, the passage doesn't end here and the God altering process doesn't end here.

We see in verse 9-10 that Isaiah's calling will be to share a message that will fall on deaf ears and blind eyes and hardened hearts. I have to wonder if Isaiah would have been so eager and enthusiastic if he had waited to hear what God was sending him to say and do.

This part of Isaiah's calling is a reminder that transformation and altered living isn't always grand or easy or a guarantee of comfort and success. It's no wonder that the portion of Isaiah that is quoted most often in the New Testament is Isaiah 6:9-10, all in the context of the rejection of God's word in Christ.

Isaiah then asks a question we also would probably be asking, "For how long, Lord?"

And well the answer Isaiah received probably wasn't the answer he was looking for.

“Until the cities lie ruined
and without inhabitant,
until the houses are left deserted
and the fields ruined and ravaged,
until the LORD has sent everyone far away
and the land is utterly forsaken.
And though a tenth remains in the land,
it will again be laid waste.
But as the terebinth and oak
leave stumps when they are cut down,
so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.” (Isaiah 6:11-13)

Doesn't really seem like a favorable outcome.

But here even in what seems discouraging and hopeless we still find a message of hope. “The holy seed will be the stump in the land.”

While we don't know exactly what the holy seed is in reference to. Whether it is the messiah or possibly in reference to a righteous remnant of God's people that survive there is hope. And God's redemption story continues. And God's transforming work carries on.

And God continues to draw people into His presence, giving us a vision of His holiness, altering our lives, and calling us to go and share the gospel of Jesus, the message of hope with others.

This is part of the life-altering work God wants to do in our lives. While it may not be what we expect or pictured, or easy and comfortable we can know it is a good work and that God is present with us through it all. As Philippians 1:6 says: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Questions for Personal Reflection and Small Group Discussion

What are some of the caricature versions of God you have either had or experienced with others?

A.W. Tozer says: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." So what comes into your mind when you think about God?

In the presence of God is where Isaiah sees the depth of his sinfulness but also the forgiveness and heart of God. What has been your experience of the presence of God?

How is your experience with God like Isaiah's? Awestruck? Guilt-ridden? Set free? Which of God's attributes have impacted your life, and how has that impacted your willingness to say, "Send me"?

In what ways has God's altering process in your life been good? Been difficult?

What does this passage have to say about being "Rooted in Jesus, Growing in His Love, [and] Branching Out to Serve Others"?