

An Encounter That Demands A Response

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[0:00] I am honored to once again be able to stand in the pulpit of Highland Park Baptist Church and bring a message in our pastor, my father's absence.

And it's a great honor. I was standing out in the hall earlier with Bobby and Max Bailey. And I told them that I had promised my dad that I would preach for at least 40 minutes this time.

I think I might have hit 30 last time. So I have prepared a 40 minute sermon. It will probably be done in 20 because when I get nervous, I tend to talk quickly.

Whenever I stand in the pulpit, whenever I bring a message, whether it's for the youth or for the adults, I feel rather inadequate, even in my preparation. Because usually the Lord visits me and I feel so sinful while I'm preparing it.

And I just, I get very nervous. I'm not ashamed to admit that. I went to a Casting Crowns concert one time when I was a teenager.

[1:19] And I think their lead singer is Mark Hall. And he came out on stage and he's a real humble, humble kind of meek guy. And you wouldn't know it if you listened to the CD and listened to his voice.

It's a very powerful voice. But he came out on the stage after a rather more rock band opened for him. And he said, man, I wish I was like that. He said, I am scared to death every time I come out on this stage.

And that is very much my feeling as I stand in this pulpit. If you would, turn with me to Isaiah chapter 6. This morning I want to preach a message.

Like I said, God has visited this message on me long before I have spoken it from this pulpit. But Isaiah chapter 6, I'm going to go ahead and read it for us.

It says this, it says, It says, And so is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips.

[2:49] And because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, Now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed and your sin is atoned for.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Who should I send? Who will go for us? I said, Here I am. Send me. By way of introduction this morning, I want to give us kind of a context in which this passage sits.

First of all, I want to give you the literary context, and that is the context of the book. The book of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah is a gigantic book. It spans 66 chapters.

In those 66 chapters, you find pretty much every type of material that the Old Testament as a whole contains. You find a writing styles of poetry. You find narrative.

You find prophecy. You find songs. You find apocalyptic warnings. The book of Isaiah is very popular in the New Testament. The book of Isaiah is quoted over 60 times throughout the New Testament, and of those 60 times, at least 20 of them refer to Isaiah by name.

[4:07] So the book of Isaiah, very popular in the Old Testament, Old Testament speakers and writers. The authorship of Isaiah is actually kind of a matter of controversy, both in conservative, moderate, and liberal circles.

I think the casual viewing would immediately suggest that Isaiah is in fact the author of Isaiah. But the fact is it's a difficult book because it spans the life of basically five kings.

And it's 66 chapters long. We start somewhere in the Assyrian Empire. We go through the Babylonian Empire. The Persian Empire is mentioned. And so a lot of people say it is not possible for one man to have lived this entire length of time and written this one book.

Now, they would attribute it, they usually would attribute chapters 1 through 39 to Isaiah. The Isaiah that we know of, the Isaiah here in chapter 6. And then after that, some people would attribute the rest of it to a Deutero-Isaiah or a second Isaiah.

And then even some would go further and say the last few chapters of the book are actually a third Isaiah. They'd attribute it to three different authors. As for myself, I don't think there's much controversy.

[5 : 20] Whenever you read Scripture, I think that you should interpret Scripture in light of Scripture as often as possible. And in the New Testament, Jesus is kind enough to refer to Isaiah.

And I don't think that he would let us continue in our wrong mindset when he says that Isaiah wrote this. He would make it clear to us. I don't think he'd let the biblical audience continue in the wrong mindset of thinking that only one author.

So, I think our Lord Jesus Christ proves the authorship of a single Isaiah. So that's the literary context in which we're reading this morning. There are some characters involved this morning. The first character that we read about is a guy named Uzziah.

Now, Uzziah was an incredible, incredible king of Israel. Most historians and biblical scholars would say that he was really the last great king of Judah. I'm sorry, I said earlier.

He was the king of the southern kingdom of Judah. He was his last great king. In fact, one historian wrote, The national glory of Israel died out too with the king Uzziah and has never been recovered to this day.

[6 : 23] Now, what we know of Isaiah is written in 2 Chronicles chapter 26. And I'll let you turn there at a different time. But basically, here's the summary of what he did. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord.

So he was a good king. He reigned for 52 years, so he had a very, very long reign. He subdued the Philistines and the Ammonites. He built towers around the gates of Jerusalem, so he strengthened God's holy city.

He built towers in the wilderness. He built many wells. And he had a fully equipped army of 307,500 men. Now, the United States forces, give or take, is about 1.4 million.

That's pretty large. I think we're the second largest army, well, third largest army behind China and Korea. But to put it in perspective, the entire nation of Israel, both southern and northern kingdoms, is a little larger than the state of Mississippi.

And this was just the southern kingdom. So he had an army of 307,500 fighting men and just half of Mississippi.

[7 : 28] This was a great, powerful king. Judah was great and powerful during his reign. Sadly, if you read in 2 Chronicles, Uzziah's power becomes a point of pride.

And he's stricken with leprosy at the end of his life because he tries to offer incense on the altar, which is a job saved only for the priests. And so that is Uzziah. And then we have a guy named Isaiah.

Isaiah was the son of Amoz. Now, Amoz is mentioned ten times throughout the biblical narrative, but we know absolutely nothing about him, even though he's mentioned quite a few times. Even Jewish tradition doesn't say a whole lot about Amoz.

But he was the father of Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied in the latter half of the 8th century, and Hebrew tradition would say that he was probably of royal lineage. This would explain his access to kings. And also Hebrew tradition hints at the fact that he may have, in fact, been related to King Uzziah. He was martyred under Manasseh, and Manasseh had him cut in half with a wooden saw.

[8 : 31] So he didn't exactly meet a good fate. His time of prophecy in the 8th century actually spans the reign of five kings. You have Uzziah, who's mentioned here.

You have Uzziah's son, Jotham. You have Ahaz. You have Hezekiah. And then, of course, he was martyred under the reign of Manasseh. And in Isaiah's time, Assyria would have been the major power, especially at this point here in chapter 6.

Assyria, the Assyrian Empire, was a major power. Like I said earlier, the Babylonian Persian Empires are mentioned as well, as you go through the book of Isaiah. But I think we can attribute that to the fact that Isaiah is very prophetic in nature.

In fact, in chapter 7, there's a prophecy about the Lord Jesus. So, that is Isaiah. Isaiah, that is an introduction, so to speak, to the book, to the people found in the book.

So, I want to dive in this morning. And we're going to start with verse 1. And I want you to notice some things. First, we're going to notice some things about God. In verse 1, it says, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and His robe filled the temple. [9:41] So, the first thing I want you to notice this morning is God's position. God's position is, in fact, on the throne. Now, understand, Isaiah, like the historian said earlier, Judah declines after this.

And so, Isaiah witnesses the decline of his nation in the death of Uzziah. And so, his friend, possibly even a relative of his, has just died.

And so, he finds himself in sorrow with a broken heart, going to the place that he is most comfortable. The place that brings him closest to the person and presence of God.

And that is the temple. Now, we ourselves often run to what is most comfortable when we face adversity, when we face sorrow, when we have need or we're stressed out.

A lot of us will run to hobbies. I play my guitar a lot. If I've had a bad day, I like to strum away on the guitar. It usually makes me feel better, unless I'm just having a bad day with guitar, then it makes me feel worse.

[10:45] Some of us might run to hobbies. Some of us might run to vices. Things that we would not normally do, but they give us comfort in whatever time of need we're facing. And so, we run to that which is most comfortable.

I think we should take careful note of what Isaiah does here. Isaiah, in his sorrow, runs to the temple. That is where he finds himself most comfortable, in the very presence of God.

I think we can relate to Isaiah a little bit here, because our nation is facing an incredible time. We're racked with debt. The world itself seems to be on the brink of destruction.

And so, I ask you this morning, where are you running? Are we like Isaiah, running to the temple, running to the feet of Jesus? Or are we, and I'm guilty as charged, are we on Facebook constructing careful arguments against some of our friends who might lean the opposite side politically from us?

Are we there, constructing our arguments? Or maybe, hey, some of us are a little concerned about the laws that are coming down in this nation, or possibly coming down. Are we guilty again? Are we stockpiling ammunition because it might be outlawed?

[11:57] What are we doing? What are we doing in this time of stress? We should be, like Isaiah, running to the feet of Jesus, running to the temple to pray.

And so, we find in verse 1 that God, His position, is on His throne. Starting in verse 2, we see another thing about God. We see His status. Verse 2 through 4, we get to see His status.

It says this, Seraphim were standing above Him. Each one had six wings. With two He covered His face. With two He covered His feet. With two He flew. And one called to another, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

His glory fills the whole earth. The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices. And the temple was filled with smoke. Now, I think in verses 2 through 4, God's status, there's two things about God's status that we should notice.

God's status is both stated verbally and it's confirmed physically. If you look, we're going to skip to verse 3 first. If you look in verse 3, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

[13:03] His glory fills the whole earth. Now, this is what the church would refer to as the trisagion. If I pronounce that wrong, I apologize. The trisagion, it basically is a Greek transliteration.

It means three times holy. God is referred to in verse 3 as holy, holy, holy. Now, this isn't redundancy for the sake of redundancy. This isn't even redundancy like we know it.

Oftentimes, redundancy for us is how we learn. We repeat and we memorize over and over and over again. And that's how we learn as human beings. But this is not the kind of redundancy that the writer of Isaiah or the seraphim, who are speaking it, are talking about.

This is a literary device employed by the Hebrew writers. You see it oftentimes throughout the biblical narrative. Basically, when a Hebrew writer wanted to emphasize something, he would repeat it.

And so here we find this repeated three times. Now, we emphasize things. We might use quotation marks. We might use exclamation marks. We might bold something or set it off in some way.

[14:07] That's what the Hebrew writer is doing here. He's setting this off. He's saying this is very important. Now, it's not the only place in Scripture, like I said, that it's found. You can look in Revelation 8.13, and it says, The eagle cries, Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth.

Again, that three times repetition. However, Isaiah 6.3 is the only time in Scripture that an attribute or characteristic of God is elevated to the third degree.

The only time. It's the only place we find it about His attributes. Now, if you'll allow me to step on my soapbox for a minute. You don't find in Scripture that God is love, love, love.

No one in Scripture will state that. No one in Scripture does it state that God is just, just, just. Or wrath, wrath, wrath. But I think oftentimes, as Christians and evangelicals, oftentimes we fall in one camp or the other.

Either God is love, love, love, and we protect and guard our words so closely that we do not offend anyone, because they might run from this loving God. Or God is wrath, wrath, wrath, and that defines our words.

[15:23] And we're always telling people, Hey, watch out for the wrath of God. But it doesn't say that in the Bible. Is God wrathful? Yes. Is God loving? Yes. Is God just?

Most certainly. But only here do we have it elevated to the third degree, an attribute of God. The author is not saying God is holy. He's not saying God is holy, holy.

He's saying that God is holy, holy, holy. The word he's using here is the Hebrew, kadosh. Kadosh means set apart.

That's the literal meaning of it. And so the author is saying, He is so utterly set apart. He is beyond us. We can't reach the heights of His holiness. We can't plumb the depths of it.

We can't wrap our arms around it or our minds around it. God is unfathomably holy. We cannot understand it. That is what the author is driving at here.

[16:19] God is holy, holy, holy. And so He elevates that attribute to the third degree. And so His status is confirmed verbally.

It's stated verbally. We also find that His status is confirmed physically. It's confirmed in verses 2 and 4. I'm going to read verse 2. It says, Seraphim were standing above Him.

Each one had six wings. With two He covered His face. With two He covered His feet. And with two He flew. So verse 2, we're introduced to some characters in our narrative.

The seraphim. Now, it's very interesting that they're mentioned here because this is the only place in the Bible that they are mentioned by name. Now, you heard Mike read earlier out of Revelation that it talks about the heavenly creatures.

And we believe that the seraphim are included in that. They're mentioned in Ezekiel and Revelation as heavenly creatures. But here, they're mentioned very specifically as seraphim. And again, there's some controversy surrounding the word because it can either come from a noun, root word, seraph, which means serpent.

[17:24] Or it can come through a verb, root word, which would mean to burn. Now, like I said earlier, the best way to interpret Scripture is with Scripture whenever possible.

And so we look and see where else in Scripture are the seraphim mentioned. Well, as I said, they're not mentioned anywhere, but this root word, we do find it. The root word is used in Numbers 21.6, Numbers 21.8, and Deuteronomy 8.15, and there, the writer is speaking about the seraph, the serpents.

If you're familiar with the story, the people are grumbling, they're complaining against God, they're unhappy, they're wanting to go back to Egypt, and so God sends serpents to terrorize them.

And basically what it's saying is the word is either used in the noun form and it's saying, hey, there are serpents here. Or when the word is used in the verb form, it's talking about the burning sensation of the serpent's venom.

The word is also used in Isaiah 14.29, and Isaiah 36. Now all of these references, except for one, Isaiah 36, the word is used in connection with judgment.

[18:35] It's used without fail in reference to some sort of serpent. Either the venom is burning, or it's describing the actual serpent. Now the word is, or the, I'm sorry, the word leads to Hebrew tradition as describing the seraphim as fiery serpents.

If you get on Google and you want to look up seraphim, there are some very, very interesting pictures involved in that. A lot of tradition holds that they have four heads, one facing each direction, and their serpent-like in their appearance because of the root word.

It is thought by, by the ancient Hebrews that anyone who looked upon a seraphim would be instantly consumed because of the brightness and the fiery nature of their appearance.

Tradition also interestingly holds that Lucifer was a seraphim before he was cast out of heaven. And that usually stems from the fact that in Genesis we see Lucifer taking the form of a serpent, of a seraph.

So, as I said, the word is used almost exclusively, say for one verse, in connection with judgment. And hear this, Isaiah would know this. He was a prophet of God.

[19:50] And so he would understand this. And so imagine this scene. Isaiah's mourning. And he goes to the temple. And in this temple you have God. Not just a picture of God.

Not the kind of pictures that we paint. But God. In all of his three times holy glory, his clothes are so big they're filling the temple. And then you have, if that wasn't bad enough, scary enough for him, you have the seraphim.

The creatures that are connected with judgment. They're considered the guardians of the holiness of God. And they're flying around with all these wings. And then there's Isaiah. And Isaiah is...

You can imagine the feeling that he is getting at this time. And so that's the stage. Verse 4 also confirms God's holiness physically.

It says this. It says, The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices and the temple was filled with smoke. Even the doorways are shaking. R.C. Sproul says this.

[20:52] He says, The inanimate thresholds, the wood and metal that could neither hear nor speak had the good sense to be moved by the presence of God. Now I think it's interesting that inanimate objects seem to be more in tune with the presence of God than often we are.

And that's the truth. Some of us, it would take a bulldozer to move us while we're worshipping. Now I love my wife. I told her I was going to talk about her during church today so that everybody can stare at her and make her feel awkward.

My wife, soon after we got here, I don't even notice it anymore to be honest because it's just my wife. It's Tony, right? And I just understand that this is something that she does.

Soon after we got here, Tom Holland walks up to me and he says, you know, I love Tony. There is not a hymn written that she won't dance to. And it's the truth.

It really is. Like if there's, it doesn't matter if it's the oldest hymn in the book or if it's the newest worship song that's been written, Tony is going to move as she sings to it and she's going to make a joyful noise to God while she dances.

[22:03] She moves. She worships. The presence of God moves her. I wish I was more like that. Most of the time I'm like holding on to the pew and I stand more still in church generally than I did in formation in the army.

And that's sad. That's sad. And so we find that His holiness is confirmed physically because even inanimate objects are quaking at this three times holy God.

Well, there's another character in the story. We gave an introduction to him. And there is this Isaiah. Now Isaiah in this passage, I think that we find that Isaiah has both a position and a status as well although they are found in reverse order.

And I would submit to you that that is always the case when it comes to us as humans, us as created beings. I don't think it's any coincidence that it's found in reverse order here in this passage because God's interaction with man always deals with our status before our position.

Our status as believers is justified before God through Jesus Christ before our position becomes that of children of God. And so let's look at verse 5 and we will see Isaiah's status.

[23:22] And it says this, it says, Then I said, Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

And so what is Isaiah's status? Well here, I'm reading from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

For those of you in the know, it's the hardcore Southern Baptist Bible. It's put out by Lifeway.

But I'm reading from that and so his status is ruined. Ruined. Now, I actually, even though I'm a young guy, I actually prefer what the King James Version says here. I don't always go with the King James Version.

I find its language difficult. But the King James Version says, Woe is me for I am undone. And that's more than ruined. Ruined, you can recover from being ruined.

There's people probably in this room that have been ruined financially in their lifetime and have recovered from that. So you can recover from being ruined, but undone.

[24:24] That just changes things entirely. Like as a human being, I stand here done. Right? I'm finished. My arms and legs are all here.

All my body parts are here. My organs are working. I'm finished. That's really what the Word says. And so, to be undone is something totally different.

That would be somehow I am not complete. And I can't complete myself. And so the King James Version, I really love it. I love it here. If you have the New American Standard or the NIV, you're going to see ruined.

If you're reading from the NSV, you're going to see lost. I don't think they capture it. And in fact, I think there is one translation that might even capture it better than the King James Version. And that's the New Living Translation.

It's not my favorite translation. But what it says, it says, I am doomed. Now we've actually gone to a whole nother level.

[25:20] We've gone from undone, something that I think communicates it greatly but may be an unfamiliar term to us, to doomed. The Hebrew word here for doomed is called damah.

It means to cease. They actually made up a meaning of it because of this verse. If you look it up, I encourage you, you can go to blueletterbible.com and you can look at the Strong's reference to it. Literally, they created a new meaning of it because of this verse. It says, to be cut off at the sight of the theophany. Now the theophany is basically the visible manifestation of God to humankind.

And so damah, I literally cease. I'm cut off. I am doomed. There is no hope for me. And so Isaiah recognizes this and he states his own status as doomed.

His outcome is inescapable. His destruction was certain. He sees a three times holy God and around that God he sees the guardians of God's holiness, the very instruments of God's judgment.

[26:30] I think we would be scraping at the floor to escape the holiness of God if we were in his situation. We couldn't dig a hole deep enough or fast enough to hide in. I really believe that.

And so Isaiah, he goes to the temple because he's sad. Sad for his country. Sad for the loss of a friend or relative. And so he goes to the temple for comfort and there meets Almighty God and his doom.

that is his status. But thankfully, we serve a gracious God. And so Isaiah's status, you know, God's status is holy.

It doesn't change. It's holy, holy, holy. Isaiah's status actually changes here. And so a gracious God moves Isaiah from utterly doomed to redeemed.

And we see that in verses 6 and 7. It says, Then one of the seraphim flew to me and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, Now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed and your sin is atoned for.

[27:42] Now, Isaiah lost me at then one of the seraphim flew to me. He had to be paralyzed with fear. He had to have not been able to move because I would have run as far as I could and as fast as I could because the instrument of God's judgment is carrying a burning coal towards me.

This is not something that I would be necessarily excited about but Isaiah stands there and receives this redemption. Now the live coal, I think that the Bible is very specific in its symbolism here.

The live coal comes from the altar. The altar is where sacrifice happens. In Old Testament, this is where sin is dealt with. Now, as believers, as the church, we understand sin is dealt with on the cross through God's sacrifice.

But in Isaiah's time, this is where sin would have been dealt with. So Isaiah, don't misunderstand, he's not receiving special treatment. He's not like, you know, everyone else had a sacrifice. Modern believers have to repent and follow Christ.

Isaiah got to have his lips burned. He's not getting like special treatment. This is symbolism for the fact that sin has been dealt with and the symbolism of his lips being touched with the coal is very exact as well.

[28:55] His lips are cleansed. If you look over to the New Testament, you can see in Luke chapter 6, verse 45, it says that man speaks from the overflow of his own heart.

And so from the heart, the mouth speaks. Now, we could do a sermon, a message, we could do like a whole series just on that. But from the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.

And so this is the point being made. Isaiah, in verse 5, confesses his status and he repents. And the coal touching his mouth is just a symbolic representation of what has already happened in his heart.

It shouldn't be hard to wrap our minds around because we're Baptists. And as Baptists, when someone submits to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ and follows Jesus Christ because he's a Christian, they get baptized in the baptistry.

Now, the only thing that happens up there is they get wet. And so the symbolism is the same.

What's happening up there is just symbolic of what has already happened in a believer's heart.

[29:56] So it's not a foreign idea to us. And so Isaiah's status, it goes from being undone, ruined, doomed, to God graciously redeeming him.

So now his status is redeemed. And finally, we can get to Isaiah's position. Isaiah's position becomes that of prophet. This is really the logical beginning of Isaiah's time as a prophet, even though it occurs in chapter 6.

So his position comes as prophet. Now this isn't, we're not talking to a preacher here. Alright? Many preachers would consider themselves prophets. I don't. I really don't.

Because a prophet in the Old Testament time and the Old Testament sense of the word is the very mouthpiece of God. Now we have this. We have God's word. It is what we read, what informs our lives as believers.

We have this. This is the living word of God, the mouthpiece of God. But in Old Testament times, they would not have had the completed word of God, and so they relied on people like Isaiah's prophets to be that mouthpiece, to speak the will of God into the people's lives.

[31:08] And that is what Isaiah's position becomes. Verse 8. It says this. It says, Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Who should I send? Who will go for us? I said, Here I am.

Send me. And so Isaiah encounters a holy God in the temple. I would submit to you this morning that that encounter demanded two responses of Isaiah.

It demanded repentance and obedience. And we see that played out in Scripture. Now to bring that home for us, when we encounter God, there's two responses required of us.

Two responses demanded of us. And that is repentance and obedience. It always demands those two responses.

It will never cease demanding those two responses. And so maybe you're here this morning and you've already encountered God. and you say, Yes, I am a believer.

[32:12] I'm a follower of Christ. I'm a Christian. Well then, are you responding in a proper way? Are you being obedient? Maybe God's calling you to the mission field.

Maybe God's calling you to be involved in the ministry of this church. Are you being obedient? Are you like Isaiah when God says, Hey, who will I send and who will go for us?

And Isaiah, Hey, here I am. Send me. No argument. I've been changed by an encounter with God.

And so are you being obedient? And this morning, if you've never encountered God, I would say to you that you have now.

I don't say that as a prideful statement as some kind of amazing speaker or preacher saying that God has spoken through me, but I have read the Word of God. You heard it now.

You heard it earlier from Revelation. And the same book, the end of Isaiah, actually says this towards the end. Isaiah 55, 11 says, The Word of God does not return void.

[33:14] And so when it is spoken, it's not just words. It doesn't return empty. God works in it. And so this morning, if you've never encountered God, you have now.

And so what is there to do? I think Matthew 4, verse 17 says it best. It says this, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

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