

Who Can We Send?

Isaiah 6:1-8

Introduction

The death of a world leader is always a significant event that reverberates globally. Last Sunday, as we were celebrating the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, the nation of Iran was hearing the news that their president, Ebrahim Raisi, had been killed when his helicopter crashed into the side of a mountain.

Tens of thousands attended his funeral in Tehran, where Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led the mourning. Raisi's coffin bore a black turban, symbolizing his direct lineage from Islam's Prophet Muhammad. The crowd chanted "Death to America!" as they carried the coffins through the streets.

- Such moments remind us of the impact world leaders have on their nations and the international community.

I remember my Grandpa Chivington talking about the same kind of worries in this country when President Roosevelt died. He had been elected to four terms. Grandpa said that as a young man he couldn't imagine a country when anyone else would be living in the White House. And Roosevelt was dead and Harry Truman was now president.

Our Old Testament text today begins with a simple statement that provides an historical context:

In the year that King Uzziah died ... (Isaiah 6:1)

Uzziah had been the king over Judah for more than 50 years. There were only a few people who could remember any other king than Uzziah. Their thoughts of David or Solomon were matters of history, not personal experience.

Uzziah was seen as a source of stability for the divided kingdom. The Assyrians had swooped in to conquer many of the surrounding nations, including the northern kingdom of Israel, but Uzziah had faithfully led the people of Judah through all the political, social, and religious threats that pressed in on them. In fact, during his reign the nation experienced great prosperity, no doubt because Uzziah worshiped God:

(Uzziah) did what was right in the eyes of the LORD ... He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success. (2 Chronicles 26:4-5)

But now King Uzziah was dead, and the country was in mourning. And in that atmosphere of uncertainty about the future, Isaiah had a life-changing experience. God called him into service.

This is the third week of a four-sermon series that focuses on finding answers to some great questions in the Bible.

- Week #1: Why are you still looking into the sky?
- Week #2: What does this mean?
- Week #4: What is lawful on the Sabbath?

This week's question arises from that life-changing vision Isaiah experienced in a time of great personal and national turmoil. In it ...

Isaiah discovered that God had a purpose for his life.

And Isaiah's experience is a good example of how God works in our lives as well. Let me identify three steps:

STEP #1: ISAIAH SAW GOD

For Isaiah, this was a majestic vision of heaven.

I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. (Isaiah 6:1)

He also saw heavenly creatures called "seraphim." These are not angels, but creatures with six wings that are part of the eternal host that praises God all the time. There was smoke and lots of voices – quite the spectacle.

When you and I see God, it is likely to be far less dramatic. You might have a vision, and if you do, I would love to hear about. But if you are like most people, you have to look a little harder to see God.

When I see God, He is most frequently at work in the lives of other people. I see Him:

- In the life of a man like Dean Settles or Sam Poston
- In the faces of the children who come forward each week to hear my Children's Sermon
- In the servant-heart of people as they minister to those who are grieving
- In the expressions of Christian community as people demonstrate a more-than-human care for other people.

I've seen God a lot this week. I also see God whenever I go into the mountains. My favorite place on earth is "Garden of the Gods" in Colorado Springs. I always sense His majesty in that place.

Seeing God is not necessarily the result of some vision, like Isaiah had. Seeing God simply means that you become overwhelmed by a sense that there is Someone outside of yourself that is infinitely greater than you are, infinitely greater than anything is. You can't necessarily explain, but you know you just saw something special happen.

Where do you see God? Or do you see Him? I can tell you how you can see Him.

- First, pray: *"Lord, in some way let me see You today."*
- Then watch. The Scriptures tell us *"those who seek me find me"* (Proverbs 8:17).

#2: ISAIAH SAW HIMSELF

When Isaiah saw God, he immediately knew something about himself. It quickly became clear that God was "holy" and that Isaiah was not.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips ... (Isaiah 6:5)

The people of the Old Testament lived with the understanding is that anyone who saw God must instantly die. God had made it clear to Moses:

No one may see me and live. (Exodus 33:20)

That all stopped with the ministry of Jesus, of course. He told His disciples that they didn't need to worry about that anymore because ...

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9)

But beyond the fear of death, when you see God you also begin to see every one of your inadequacies and failures. You see sense your insignificance. You see a holy God and an unholy you. – everything that makes us unqualified and unworthy.

The great hymn writer Isaac Watts saw God and wrote:

*Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sov'reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?*

Some hymnals have changed the words to make people less offended, so it reads "for sinners such as I." But I always sing "worm" because I know that is what I am.

Truly seeing yourself will always result in a confession of your "worm-ness." Isaiah cried "Woe to me." And our wonderful, holy God will always respond to our confessions of "worm-ness" with His mercy and grace. In Isaiah's case, one of those heavenly creatures:

...flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:6-7)

Centuries later the truth is still ours to claim. "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

STEP #3: ISAIAH SAW THE NEED

It is at that point, that Isaiah saw what God saw. He saw the need of the people around him, and He heard God's question. And because he had seen God, and because he had experienced God's touch in his life, he was able to respond eagerly and in faith:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)

APPLICATION

When God calls, the sequence is important, for it is through that sequence that the power of God is unleashed to make a difference in the world. We need to

1. See God – holy and full of glory
2. See ourselves – a people in need of His touch, His forgiveness, His mercy and grace
3. See the need – then and only then can we truly go forward as His people, ministering in His name.

If the sequence is right, we go out in His power and strength. That's what the disciples did at Pentecost (celebrated last week).

1. They saw and experienced Jesus – and through Him the Father
2. They saw their own sinfulness and inadequacy. They saw how they, under their own power, denied Him, ran away from Him, questioned Him, deserted Him.

But forgiven, they proclaimed the news of Jesus to the uttermost parts of the earth.

If the sequence is scrambled, if you ...

- Put yourself first, then everything becomes about you
 - Your feelings
 - Where you appropriately thanked?
 - Your wishes, your agenda, your expectations of how things should be done
- Put the need first, then you miss the ministry
 - It becomes nothing more than charity work, and any pagan can do that

When God calls, He intends to do something beautiful through your life... something that can only be done through His power ... something that will make an eternal difference for someone.

The prophet Isaiah – this man of unclean lips – is the most quoted Old Testament prophet in the entire New Testament. About 30 of his prophecies were directly about

the coming Messiah. Many centuries later, his prophecies would even be the inspiration behind Handel's *Messiah*.

But it all starts with seeing God. Look for Him today.

Amen.