

# WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

by Danny Hall

---

Here we are on the first Sunday of the fifty-first year of our existence as a church, facing into the next half-century. We had a wonderful celebration of our fiftieth anniversary, yet we have to ask ourselves, Where do we go from here? As we launch into the next phase of our existence or continue on in what God is doing among us, we want to be grounded in who he is. So in this message and the next we're going to go back to the basics and talk about God.

Going through that celebration was an interesting experience for me, because my history at PBC goes back only fourteen months. So my perspectives on it were somewhat different. To be perfectly honest, I wasn't very excited about it. As the College Pastor, I wouldn't have scheduled the fiftieth anniversary celebration for the same week as the first week of school for college students. And I was a bit fearful that we would wallow around in all the sentimental memories of the past, feel all warm and fuzzy, and that would be it. So I found myself a lot of times sitting back and just observing what was going on. As I did so, I thought more and more about the good and the bad impact of what was happening. Of course there is always a danger in looking back.

I read an interesting article in, of all places, the *Stanford Daily* last spring. Kerry Rodgers, a columnist on the editorial page, would be wryly amused about being quoted in an evangelical worship service. But I've found the cynical way she expressed her opinions on a number of topics to be quite entertaining. In this column she wrote about her experiences as a graduating senior and how all the things that usually goes along with graduation time made her nauseated: looking back through their four years, all the weepiness, and so on. But in the midst of all that she actually made some good points. She said,

*"This is the real crime of nostalgia. In the nostalgic mentality, the locus points for the best of times are the days of yore. Nostalgia construes bygone eras as the zeniths of earthly existence. Fantasizing about the past breeds complacency in the present and pessimism about the future. It encourages ruminating on the way things used to be, instead of envisioning the way they could be." (1)*

Now, I wouldn't for a moment suggest that we've been guilty of that, but there is an important word for us here. What will we do now? Will we simply look back and remember the good old days when the services and the atmosphere were different, when so-and-so was preaching and it was all warm and wonderful? Or will we look back and see God alive and working in our midst and become hopeful about what he is going to do in the future? We all look back, of course. The nation of Israel did. Sometimes they looked back in ways that were unhealthy and sometimes in ways that were good.

After they had been taken into exile by the Babylonians and had lived for a long time in exile, with their nation and their temple destroyed, God allowed them back into the land, and they rebuilt the temple. The prophet Haggai records the story of how some of the people who had been alive when the former temple was in place were totally depressed about this new temple because it just didn't seem anywhere near as good as the former one.

At other times God himself called his people to establish memorials, not so they would see the past as the good old days, but so they would remember the goodness and faithfulness of God and so their hope for the future would be built on the strength of the past.

In this message I want us to look toward the future by going back and looking at the past in an encounter that the prophet Isaiah had with God. It will be instructive to us because of the context in which it happened and the lessons that we can derive from Isaiah's experience.

## PRIDE AND HUMILITY

Isaiah 6 begins with an extremely important historical reference:

**In the year of King Uzziah's death....**

Uzziah was the king of Judah. At the time of this writing, the year that he died, he was sixty-eight years old, after having reigned as the king of Judah for fifty-two years. That means he became the king when he was sixteen years old. His father before him is described interestingly by the writer of 2 Chronicles. He had also become king at an early age, and it was said of him, "...He did right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a whole heart" (2 Chronicles 25:2). Later in his life he drifted away from God and basically lost his throne, and Uzziah was put in his place.

We are told Uzziah's story in 2 Chronicles 26. He had a very profitable reign. We are told that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord richly blessed him even as a teenager. The nation prospered under him. Now, I can imagine a sixteen-year-old who assumed the role of king having all kinds of problems to deal with. I'm sure there were powerful figures around him who wanted to use him for their own ends. He was probably overwhelmed with the challenge of being

the monarch of the nation. And so from the very beginning he trusted in God, and God began to prosper him and to build him up. (It seems that if he wasn't an engineer, he at least was very interested in engineering, because his reign is described as one in which all kinds of new weapons of warfare were developed. So he would have fit right in here in Silicon Valley.)

Then in 2 Chronicles 26:15 it says tellingly, "Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong." In verses 16ff Uzziah decided that now he was a prosperous, successful, conquering king. We're not sure exactly what age he was, but I presume it's later in his life. He had now conquered lands and built great armies. His fame had spread. He began to think, "I'm an important person. I'm strong. I've accomplished this."

One day he walked into the temple and decided to burn the incense himself in violation of God's clear command for the order of worship. "I can worship the way I want to. I don't have to pay homage to God's ordinances. I'm the king, I can do what I want." In his arrogance and pride he usurped the authority of the priests and approached God on his own terms, not God's. The priests discovered him in the temple doing this, and shocked, they rushed in to try to stop him. He raised a rod against them, ready to attack those who were trying to call him to account. But God struck him with leprosy. He spent the rest of his life as an invalid and an outcast. His own young son was put in his place on the throne.

When Isaiah has this vision in the sixty-eighth year of King Uzziah's life, either Uzziah has just died or he is about to die after a period of punishment from God because of his arrogance and pride. He threw away all that he had gained in terms of trusting God and allowing God to bless him. So Isaiah comes to seek God in this moment as God's prophet to his people. Isaiah is probably disillusioned. "This king whom we trusted has now been judged in his arrogance and pride, and he has thrown the nation into chaos because of that. Where do we go from here?"

Contrast the pride and arrogance of King Uzziah with the humility in which Isaiah tries to figure out what to do.

We don't know where Isaiah is physically. The vision that he has is of the Lord in the temple, so perhaps Isaiah himself has gone into the physical temple to seek God. But in any case he comes into the presence of God, and he has a marvelous and instructive encounter.

#### AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE LORD

I want to outline this encounter for you using the four verb phrases by which Isaiah describes his interaction in this: "I saw," "I said," "I heard," and "I said."

First of all he says, "I saw." Verses 1b-4:

**...I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim 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. And one called out to another and said,**

**"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,  
The whole earth is full of His glory."**

**And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.**

Here is an incredible portrait of majesty and sovereignty, of power and mystery, of a God who is greater than our conception of him. He is revealing himself to Isaiah in power and majesty far beyond that of the God Uzziah had imagined, whose commands he could nonchalantly disregard.

Isaiah also sees around this God those who are living forever in his presence, and even they are instructive to us. These creatures are called the seraphim. This passage is the only place in Scripture where they're mentioned. The word means "the burning ones." These flaming, bright, angelic beings are described as having three pairs of wings. That too can be instructive to us. The first pair cover their eyes, indicating that even the angels who live in God's presence regard his might and holiness as so tremendous and mysterious and terrible that they cannot gaze upon him. The second pair of wings cover their feet. Commentators have debated exactly what that means. I believe the feet represent the path that we take, and their wings covering their feet simply means these angelic beings choose not their own path, but the path that God has laid for them. With the third pair of wings they fly about. This is a picture of constant activity. They're antiphonally and continuously singing to one another,

**"Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts,  
The whole earth is full of His glory."**

#### REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Isaiah's glimpse of this incredible scene leads to the second verb phrase, "I said." Verse 5:

**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;  
For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."**

When we come face-to-face with the living God in all of his power and holiness and majesty and sovereignty, there is but one response: to fall flat on our face before him and cry, "Woe is me!"

When Isaiah, who is trying to figure out what to do, finds himself in the presence of this wonderful, marvelous, awesome God, his reaction is anguish. He knows his only possible response is total humility before God. Who is he to even be in this place? And he is not only overtaken by his own sinfulness, but he is reminded that his whole nation is a sinful nation. So he cries out with a heart of anguish not only for his own sin but also for the sin of the nation. He understands his own wickedness and the wickedness of the society, and his heart is broken and humiliated before this holy, righteous, sovereign God.

Now there's a pause in the sequence of these verb phrases, because something else happens. Verses 6-7:

**Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs. And he touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."**

Once God gets Isaiah on his face before him in humility and repentance, Isaiah is a candidate for his incredible, amazing grace. And so as Isaiah is crying out with anguish in his soul, one of the seraphim goes and takes a coal off of the altar of sacrifice and places it on his lips. The lips are symbolic in Scripture of all that is within us that would come out. The seraph says, "See, now your sins are forgiven." When we come into the presence of the living God, our only response is the anguished cry of repentance, and then we are candidates for the free and wonderful grace of God. Isaiah is totally set free by the purifying coal off the altar of sacrifice, prefiguring Christ himself, who would one day be the ultimate sacrifice with which our lives can be graciously cleansed.

#### FREEDOM TO RESPOND TO GOD'S CALL

Now as a cleansed and forgiven human being, Isaiah says, "I heard." Verse 8a:

**Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"**

It is the forgiven to whom God speaks, those who have been touched by his grace. He turns to them and says, "Who will go for Us?"

Then the fourth and final verb phrase in the sequence is "I said." Verse 8b:

**Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"**

Just a few moments earlier, all that came out of Isaiah's mouth was "Woe is me!" Now, released and forgiven by the grace of God, he is free to respond to the call of God.

The sequence of events is crucial in this encounter: "I saw the Lord," then "I said, 'Woe is me,'" then "I heard the voice of the Lord," then "I said 'Send me.'" We tend to have superficial encounters with God. We play with religion. We want just a little bit of God so we can feel good about ourselves. When we start trying to manage the encounter ourselves, we go immediately from "I saw the Lord as I wanted to see him" to "What do you want me to do, God?" But that's not what happens here.

The first time I really got a concrete example of that was when I was pastoring a little church in rural Mississippi as a young man. I was in my late twenties, finishing up seminary, and I thought I knew everything (but I didn't know anything). It was in the Bible Belt, deep in the heart of the rural South, where everybody, no matter who they were, was affiliated with some church somewhere. I couldn't say anything about Jesus that they didn't understand. It was very difficult to even find language with which I could talk about spiritual truth, because it was all enshrouded in the Christian Bible-Belt culture. And no matter who I was talking to, if I managed to talk to them about spiritual things, their response was, "I know I ought to be in church." As a young man trying to hang onto my self-control, I remember wanting to scream out, "Why do you think you need to be in church? What good would that do you?"

The response of the heart that is playing with getting close to God is "What can I do to make it better?" But the response of the heart that truly sees God is "There isn't anything I can do to get better." It is total humility before him. The cry "Woe is me!" upon encountering God is instructive to us, because we can't short-circuit this process or interrupt God's sequence of dealing with us. We can't say, "God, what do you want me to do to make it better?" God is calling out to us to see that we can't do anything to make it better. We have to come to him on his terms: face him for all that he is in his glory, be humbled before him, and then be touched by his grace. There was nothing Isaiah could do to fix the situation except receive the grace of God as he responded in repentance to the greatness of the holy God.

Then the voice of God says, "Who will go for me?" Now as the forgiven servants of God, not because we're trying to make it right but because our hearts have been set free by God's grace, we can say, "Yes, Lord, send me!" You see, obedience is the response of the forgiven heart. It's not the act of the unforgiven heart trying to justify itself. There is a world of difference.

## THAT WE MIGHT KNOW GOD

But what can we draw from this today? How can we bring it down to where we are, both as a church and as individuals?

It began to become clear to me in the middle of the fiftieth anniversary celebration last week at least one way that you and I must think about this passage and the whole historical context, and what God might be saying to us at this time as a church and to us personally. As I sat through it, at times as a detached observer of what was going on, time and time again I heard reference to one specific aspect of this church's heritage. Testimony after testimony from people in the pew and in the pulpit referred to the expository preaching of the word. I want to respectfully say that everyone who said that was wrong-not about what they meant by it, but what would be true if we took that statement at face value. What is great about this church is not its expository preaching and teaching, but the presence of God. The reason expository preaching and teaching are so central to what we do here is not that they are ends in themselves. It is that they are a means to know God.

Here is where the danger lies for you and for me. With fifty years of commitment to the teaching and preaching of the word of God, we could fall into the sin of Uzziah very easily. "We're good at this. Let's start a new Bible class, let's add this seminar, let's bring this teacher...." We can teach the Bible. We can all take reams of notes about Scripture. We can win every Bible trivia game we play. But we can also become arrogant and prideful about this. I'm not saying that's where we are. I'm saying we must be careful that we don't fall into the sin of Uzziah. He wasn't always prideful either. He started out trusting God to be great and to help him. But he came to the point where he trusted in his skill more than he did God.

At the threshold of the next half-century, on the first Sunday of the fifty-first year of our existence, we need to remember that all we say and do in the word of God, why we preach and teach this word, why we ask you to study this word, is not so we can all be Bible scholars, but so that we might know God, so that we can see him face to face. How can we have a vision of the great and holy and mighty and wondrous God of the Scriptures? By living in them. His Holy Spirit takes that word and makes it alive in our hearts, and we have an encounter with the living God. Lest we fall into the seduction of King Uzziah and become prideful about the things that only ought to facilitate that which is good, we need to recommit ourselves to not just knowing the word of God, but knowing the God of the word.

What does this mean to us personally? The more I thought about this, the more uncomfortable I became. It finally dawned on me that the core of how this hits me personally is the game I play, which I'm afraid all of us play because we're all human beings, which I call the "If Only" game. Do you play that game? Your life isn't what you want it to be, you don't feel exactly great about problems arising, dealing with stress, dealing with family or whatever. So you start saying...

"If only my boss wasn't such a creep."

"If only I had a little bit more money."

"If only my wife understood that I need to be the supreme commander of the TV remote control."

"If only my husband."

"If only my children didn't detest me."

"If only my parents weren't so dense."

If only I had this, if only that"

We get our eyes on this milieu in which we live, and somehow we have bought into the lie that if we could latch onto the one "if only" correctly, our lives would be better. We would get to the next step. I find my heart being drawn in those directions constantly.

God just wants to peel all that garbage out of the way and say, "You don't need any of that. You don't need a better wife or husband, better parents, better teenagers, a better boss, or more money."

Whether as a church we're figuring out what the next fifty years will be or as individuals we're figuring out what the next hour will be, the need is the same. What you and I need is to see God and to hear his voice. We need him. When we see him and are exposed for who we are in all our wretched sinfulness and weakness, and we fall on our face before him, then and only then are we candidates for his grace. And the marvelous thing is that he lifts us up out of the mire and says, "Your sins are forgiven." Then out of that wonderful release, when he says to us, "Who will go for me?" we're free to respond, "Here am I."

## NOTES

1. Kerry Rodgers, "From the Fourth Dimension," *Stanford Daily*, June 3, 1998. P. 5A.

The Scripture quotations in this message are all taken from New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

---

Catalog No. 8159  
Isaiah 6:1-8  
First Message  
Danny Hall  
October 4, 1998

[Back to Index Page](#)

Copyright© 1998 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.