

God Calls the Prophet Isaiah

Isaiah 6:1-13

(Background: 2 Chronicles 26:1-23)

Key Theme: God's Holiness & Man's Sinfulness;

Right Use of the Law

[Core Gospel Concepts: Use of the Law, Sin, Justification]

THE STORY:

Uzziah had been one of the godly kings of Judah during the time of the divided kingdom. As long as he humbly sought the Lord and listened to the Lord's priests, God gave Uzziah success against his enemies. But later, when he was strong, he became proud and burned incense in the temple, ignoring the priests' cries for him to stop and leave. So the Lord afflicted him with leprosy, and he died alone, never able to enter the temple again.

Isaiah was one of the great prophets God sent to Judah to warn them of judgment for their sins, and to give them hope of future blessing when they repent. This is the story of how God called Isaiah during the sad time after Uzziah died a leper. Isaiah describes what happened:

"I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. His robe was so long that it filled the whole temple. Above him were angels, each with six wings. Two wings covered their faces, two covered their feet, and the other two were used for flying. They were calling out to each other: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'

"At the sound of their voices the whole place shook and the temple was filled with smoke. And I cried out, 'Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.'

"Then one of the angels flew to me with a burning 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.'

"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!'"

Then God gave Isaiah the difficult task of preaching to his hard-hearted people even though most would not listen and would be destroyed, and only a remnant of faithful people would remain.

Optional Memory Verse: Psalm 51:1-3: *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me."*

Introduction Question (discuss with a neighbor)

What is the closest, most frightening experience you have had with thunder or lightning or some

kind of extreme weather? How did you feel during the storm? What do you do when you feel helpless?

Teacher's Transition Statement

Today's story tells of a man who suddenly saw God in his glory alongside his own sin and weakness, who felt far more helpless than you and I have ever felt.

Learn Story Together (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - How is the Lord described in this story when he appears to Isaiah?
 - How does Isaiah respond when he sees the Lord's glory and holiness?

Basic Outline of Discussion (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **God:** How was his holiness and greatness displayed?
- **Old Isaiah:** What did he learn about himself when bowing before God's holiness? Why did he talk of lips?
- **Burning Coal:** Where did hope come from in the midst of Isaiah's despair?
- **New Isaiah:** How was he changed? What changed him?
- **God's Law:** How do we see God's law (God's holiness) working rightly in Isaiah's life in this story?
- **Application:** What needs to change in my life after studying this story? What actions, attitudes, or beliefs? What are your riches? What do you need to sell?
- **Sharing:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

- **What do we learn from this story about God? What words or phrases would you use to describe him?**
 - *He is powerful, awesome, holy beyond description, unapproachable by sinful man, supreme over all, he is the only King.*
- **What are some of the ways this story shows us God's holiness and greatness?**
 - *He is on the only throne in the temple, high, exalted, his robe filled the temple.*
 - *Angels worshiping – even sinless angels covered themselves due to his greatness.*
 - *Angels' words: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty; the earth is full of his glory."*
 - *Sounds so powerful that his voice shook the temple and filled it with smoke.*
 - *Sinful Isaiah was overwhelmed just to see God.*
- **What does this story teach us about Isaiah, or about ourselves? Why does Isaiah mention his and his countrymen's lips?**
 - *Deeply sinful.*
 - *He came from a sinful race of people, i.e. all are sinful, no one is good enough.*
 - *Sin is deeply related to his lips, his words. Words are the fruit of one's heart.*
 - *He feels helpless and unworthy to be in God's holy presence.*
- **How did Isaiah respond when confronted head on with God's holiness?**
 - *Despair, "woe is me." I deserve God's punishment, my people and I deserve nothing. We are deeply tainted by sin.*
 - *Overwhelmed because he had looked upon the Lord in his holiness.*
 - *Lost hope in himself and his own righteousness. He knew he was deeply sinful.*

- **What did Isaiah deserve from God? What did he get instead? What does this tell us about God?**
 - *Isaiah deserved death, but was given mercy.*
 - *God loves to show mercy and to use broken, contrite sinners, those who admit they cannot measure up to his standards, for the purposes of his glory. God came near to him.*
- **What did God use to change Isaiah?**
 - *He touched him with the burning coal in order to take away his guilt and atone for his sin.*
- **Where did the coal come from?**
 - *From the altar, the place of sacrifice, where sin is atoned for by an innocent lamb substituted for the sinner.*
 - *This is pointing ahead to the “hot love” of Jesus, sacrificing his life on the altar of the cross to be a substitute for sinners like you and me.*
- **What proof was there of a changed life?**
 - *Isaiah was no longer afraid of God’s presence. He rejoiced to be in God’s presence!*
 - *God’s mercy empowered him, made him willing and eager to go. “Here I am! Send me. I want to go!”*
- **What did God tell Isaiah to do? Was it an easy job? Was he willing? Where did he get confidence?**
 - *He was called to a very difficult task of preaching to hard-hearted people. Preaching without response from his listeners. A refining message of judgment and pruning of the people of Israel.*
 - *Until the land is utterly forsaken and the people utterly judged, until only a holy seed, a holy remnant is left in the land. A remnant faithful to the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15).*
 - *Isaiah was eager to obey because he had been cleansed by the gospel, by the “hot love” of Jesus which had touched him.*
- **So what do we learn from this story about how man is able to approach God, serve God, please God, and be changed by God?**
 - *He cannot deny God’s holiness or his own sinfulness.*
 - *He must admit his own sin and unworthiness and throw himself on the mercy of God.*
 - *He must be cleansed by the substitute sacrifice, the love of God.*
- **What kind of person can God use and work with?**
 - *Anyone! No matter how sinful, if they see their sin and God’s holiness, and receive his mercy, he will change them and empower them for the work he is calling them to.*
- **How can seeing God’s holiness help us to change?**
 - *A vision of God’s holiness should drive us to the Savior. There we are cleansed, changed, and empowered.*

General Application Questions (discuss with whole group)

- **When Isaiah was trembling before God, overwhelmed by his own sinfulness, he probably could think of some specific sins in his life that really condemned him before God. The same thing can happen to us when we look honestly at God's law - we become convicted of specific**

sin. What do you think are some of the kinds of sins that people would feel condemned about if they faced God in his holiness like Isaiah did?

- **What are some specific situations that people may be in where they may easily feel overwhelmed by their own sin and weakness?**
- **How can someone become more aware of God's holiness and areas of sin in his life?**
 - *Study his Word more and more.*
 - *Ask the Holy Spirit to show you your sin and lead you to repentance. (Psalm 139:23, 24)*
 - *Look for ways that you fail to love others.*
 - *Observe your lips! What is coming out of them? Lips, or words, display the truth of our hearts. ("What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and defiles a man." Matthew 15:18)*
- **When you feel overwhelmed by your own sins and failures, what do you think God's message to you would be? What would he want to say to you? What does he want you to understand and believe?**
 - *Come into my presence, trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus.*
 - *Let me cleanse you with the "hot love" of Jesus.*

Personal Application Questions (choose one or two for small group discussion)

- **If you imagine yourself in Isaiah's position before God, what do you think your thoughts would be? What particular sins or law breaking in your life do you think you would become aware of? What do you need to repent of? How can this help you understand more your deep need for the Savior?**
- **Is there a particular sin of your lips in your life now that reveals a heart of unbelief or rebellion? What would it be like for you to repent and trust in the Savior for this issue?**
- **What might your Savior God be calling you to do? Where might he want to send you? How can you become convinced that he is trustworthy enough to be followed even when it is very difficult?**