

## “Holy Smoke”

### Isaiah 6:1-8

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Have you shared your most intimate encounter with God? If you have, I would be willing to say that you chose your audience carefully. This kind of testimony is usually packed with strong emotions and difficult to put into words. I commend you if you have done so and trust that it helped you and inspired those that heard it.

Occasionally, someone will share with me a memorable encounter with God, which I consider a gift. I listen carefully, and if I sense it is appropriate, I'll ask some questions.

Why do you think you had this encounter? What triggered it? What did you learn from it? What difference has it made in your life?

I would love to ask Isaiah these questions concerning, what I assume, was his most intimate encounter with God. Perhaps we'll get some answers as we examine our text this morning.

Before I share Isaiah's vision and encounter, let me say three things about it. It is obvious by reading the text that Isaiah's experience was personal, enlightening and powerful.

**First and foremost, it was personal.** It was between God and him. We cannot mimic it and don't need to do so. This was Isaiah's vision. Don't even try to reproduce it or feel guilty if you can't. That is not its purpose.

**Secondly, it was enlightening.** It taught him what he needed to know at that point in his life about God, others and himself. It can provide some good lessons for us, too.

**Thirdly, it was powerful.** It catapulted him to a deeper level of commitment and service than he had ever known. This priest became a prophet whose voice still speaks through the written word. Perhaps it can motivate us to be of greater service to our Lord, too.

Having said this, I want to share with you Isaiah's unique encounter with God. Those of you who are familiar with this passage know that it is used as a model for planning worship. Imbedded in it are the major elements of worship, including praise and adoration, confession of sin, absolution, the invitation to serve and the worshiper's response. Listen for these components as I expound on Isaiah's dramatic experience in the temple.

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty, and the hem of His robe filled the temple”* Isaiah 6:1.

Was the mention of Uzziah's death merely a way of marking time or was there a connection between his death and this divine visit and heavenly vision? There is really no way to know, but lessons can be drawn from either scenario.

Sometimes the most personal encounters with God occur when least expected, on ordinary days. On the other hand, traumatic events like the death of a beloved national leader can lead to an unforgettable spiritual encounter. Perhaps you have experienced this when a president or other prominent leader died.

I see the two events, Uzziah's death and Isaiah's vision, connected. Uzziah was the only King that Isaiah knew and I sense there was deep respect for him. Uzziah ruled Judah for forty years and his reign ushered in a time of peace and prosperity unknown since the days of David and Solomon. Surely Isaiah, like his neighbors, was worried about the future. What would make Isaiah feel better? This vision of God was the very thing he needed and the timing could not have been better. The Lord, referred to as Adoni or helper in this text, was with him in his hour of greatest need.

Perhaps you need to be reminded of God's constant concern for you because you have lost someone dear and precious to you. Like Isaiah, you are worried about your future and the

future of those you love. Allow your faith to remind you of God's goodness and faithfulness. He will be your helper in time of need, too.

*"Seraphs were in attendance above Him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet and with two they flew. And one called to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.' The pivots of the thresholds shook at the voices of those that called Him holy, and the house was filled with smoke" Isaiah 6:2-4.*

In Isaiah's vision, God was not alone but surrounded by angelic beings that praised Him by announcing His distinctiveness, goodness, majesty and power. They were celebrating the fact that there was no place on earth that was off limits to God, in or outside of Israel. He inhabited it all, including the temple where Isaiah was. God was there, in his very presence.

How did Isaiah respond when he realized that he was in the presence of God? It was quite a contrast to the angelic beings that were celebrating.

*"And I said, 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'" Isaiah 6:5.*

This was an amazing confession for several reasons. Isaiah was a part of the aristocracy of Judah. He did not lack for self-esteem or confidence. To acknowledge a sense of unworthiness in anyone's presence was unprecedented.

Prior to Isaiah's confession, a person in God's presence was aware of his or her mortality and dependence upon God, but not sinfulness. Isaiah, on the other hand, was keenly aware of his lack of holiness. He knew that he was not as good as the God that made and visited him. He saw the inconsistency between his words and actions, and not only his, but all those around him. Like a leper, he felt separated from God, cut off from the One that he needed most in his life during his time of grief and uncertainty.

I am impressed with Isaiah's depth of honesty and humility. In his heart, he knew that he was no different from the people he interceded for as a priest. His clerical robes could not hide his own sins from God.

Look what happened when Isaiah was honest and humble. He caught a glimpse of God, which did not go unnoticed by Jesus. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. I certainly see Isaiah's influence upon him.

Are you as honest and humble as Isaiah? Have you confessed your sins today? How do you think God will respond? Ask Isaiah.

*"Then one of the seraphs flew to me holding a live coal in his hand that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said, 'Now this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out'" Isaiah 6:6-7.*

God responded by granting forgiveness, taking away his sin and removing his guilt! Notice that no animal had to be sacrificed for this cleansing to occur. It was a non-violent atonement. All that was needed was honest confession and genuine repentance, which could occur anywhere at anytime by anyone.

What was Isaiah's response to God's act of mercy? *"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.

What a change in Isaiah's attitude. Earlier he felt separated from God and doomed to die but now he felt separated from his sin and ready to live. "Here am I. Send me!" he said in response to God's invitation and challenge. What a difference forgiveness can make.

Much has been written about Isaiah's eagerness to serve God even though the details of this mission were lacking. **Where do you think God wanted Isaiah to go and what do you think He wanted him to do?** I think He wanted Isaiah to go to his neighbors and share his experience. He wanted Isaiah to call them to repentance and offer the assurance of forgiveness. He wanted him to model a life of integrity, compassion and grace, giving his neighbors hope for a better life.

**Why did Isaiah accept God's challenge, knowing it would not be easy?** Certainly, he trusted God, but I also believe he knew how much he needed to be a good neighbor and offer those around him the same help and hope he found in his faith.

**Are you a good neighbor?** Do you know someone who has lost their way? Are they reeling from a traumatic experience that has left them feeling lonely, frightened or guilty? What could you say or do that would make a difference in their life and give them hope?

**Who did this for you?** Who came to you in your darkest hour and revived your spirits? Who gave you hope for a better life when you lost your way? Who modeled a better way for you? Have you done this for others?

I challenge you to do it, and when you do, I believe you will have another unforgettable encounter with God that you may want to share with others.