

**“Stepping Up and Stepping Out” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Epiphany 5
February 6, 2022**

- I. **Isaiah 6:7-8** – ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” ⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”
- II. **The Prophet Isaiah is taken on the ride of his life today.**
 - a. First of all, I need to put this scene in context for you, as Isaiah was in a unique time and place in the history of God’s people.
 - i. We are learning much of this in our Bible studies of Samuel and Kings, but the year is around 740 B.C. – or seven and half centuries before Jesus was born.
 1. At this point, the reigns of King David and his son, King Solomon are long over... and because of Solomon’s unfaithfulness to God, the kingdom of Israel has been broken up into two... Israel to the north and Judah to the south.
 - a. So, in this reading, Isaiah is in the southern kingdom of Judah, which is where Jerusalem and temple were.
 - ii. In the chapters that lead up to this scene, God is giving Isaiah visions of the problems facing Judah and the people who are walking away from God’s love and care...
 1. In chapter 5, right before our reading today, God shows Isaiah a vision of a vineyard... and how He took care of it in every way... only to have it produce bitter, wild grapes... of course God means the people of Israel and how they wouldn’t produce good fruit even though God did everything for them.
 2. And now Isaiah is given a new vision of God’s glory in the temple...
 - b. It was probably just another ordinary day in Jerusalem, and Isaiah may have been considering all these visions of the Lord that reminded him of how bad things were.
 - i. God’s own people – the ones He had delivered out of Egypt and slavery – the ones He had given the Promised Land – had turned their back on Him and were worshiping and trusting in other gods.
 - c. So Isaiah has a vision of the temple... and heaven.
 - i. I’m sure his eyes were as big as saucers...
 - ii. There before him was the throne of heaven and God Himself – with the train of His robe filling the place (meaning His presence was there just like the cloud at Mt Sinai)
 - iii. ...And the seraphim were hovering next to the throne.

1. These seraphim are great creatures and servants of God – and they begin to chime back and forth to each other “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (vs 3)
 2. It’s like saying good, better, best... holy, holy, holy means God is supremely holy and perfect – the ultimate in power and glory.
 3. The whole place starts shaking from their booming voices – and you can only imagine what those sound waves would have felt like for Isaiah!
- d. We cannot know what was going through Isaiah’s mind up to that point, but awe-filled wonder immediately turned to another reality... he had no business being in God’s presence.... he was a sinner

III. **The same goes for us...**

- a. Many of us grew up around church, so it seems very foreign and strange to say that we don’t belong in God’s presence.
- b. God is love, right? So if He loves us, then He wants us to be around Him... and yet, like Isaiah, we are a people of unclean lips. (vs 5)
 - i. This just means that we are born with a condition called sin... a problem we cannot overcome on our own... and it causes a separation from God – or it causes UNholiness
 - ii. Lots of people say to themselves, “well, I’m not that bad...” – but any amount of sin is too much to be in God’s presence!
- c. All of us have to admit we are not perfect – at some point in our lives we have disobeyed God’s perfect standard – whether it was stealing, lying, lust or trusting in anything besides God.
 - i. The point is that we all fall short of His glory (Romans 3:23) and have no business being around Him.
- d. I once heard that God’s holiness and power could be compared to the sun.
 - i. The sun is great for warmth and energy – it keeps our planet green and healthy... but we almost always use it indirectly – because staring at it will fry your eyes – and how close could you get to it before it burned you up?
 1. It’s not that God’s holiness is bad... it’s so good that the bad in us could never stand to be in His presence...
- e. Yet, in our reading today, Isaiah was right there.... Scary.
 - i. He comes to his senses after this amazing vision of God and heaven, and realizes that he’s not holy... he’s a sinner and so is everyone around him... and he prepares to be annihilated.

IV. **However, Yahweh – the LORD God – did something amazing.**

- a. Instead of punishing Isaiah for not being holy enough, God sent a seraphim as he stood there... probably frozen in fear.

- i. By all rights Isaiah should have been destroyed on the spot – as God Himself even told Moses in Exodus 33:20, “...you cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.”
 - ii. But, using a coal from the altar, the seraphim brings it over to Isaiah, touches his lips with it and says, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” (vs 7)
- b. So, what does this mean?
 - i. Up to that point, it was the people who had to get right before they came near the Lord – they were required to sacrifice animals or do any number of cleansing rituals to be in His presence – but even then it was only a select few.
 - ii. The message was clear, if you got right by doing the right things, you could be in God’s presence.
 - iii. And yet, here is something totally different going on – the seraphim comes to Isaiah and makes him holy...
 - iv. The power and holiness of God did not annihilate, but instead transformed.
- c. Isaiah’s sin and guilt was atoned for – and the word atone is easier to understand when we just break it up – “at one” with God.
 - i. God chooses to come to us and break down the barrier of sin to forgive us – to make us holy in His sight.
 - ii. The coal that touched Isaiah’s lips was a symbol of something better to come – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.
- d. What happened to Isaiah is kind of what happens to us Christians...
 - i. Instead of a seraphim, the Holy Spirit is hard at work bringing the work of Jesus out to people like us – and as we come to faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we receive this forgiveness of our guilt and sin.
 - ii. And even better – as we come to the rail and receive the true body and blood of Jesus in His supper, the forgiveness of sins is spoken again to us each and every time!
- e. Not only are we able to be in God’s presence by the work of Jesus, God dwells with us and in us.

V. **The natural response to God’s amazing work for us is just like Isaiah’s.**

- a. Here I am, send me! (vs 8)
- b. It’s natural to step up for God’s call when He first comes to us and gives us love, and life... freedom and even eternal salvation.
- c. It’s not because we are so great, but the fact that God has transformed us by His power and mercy that gives us the confidence to step up to His call.
- d. And beyond the willingness to be of service to Him, we are also ready to actually step out and do what He desires as well.

- e. Stepping up and stepping out cannot come without God's work in our lives first – in other words, we need to come to faith first, and then our response is to go out into the world and share the love of Christ with others.
- f. This is our calling – to step up to God's call... and then to step out into the world around us as we share the transformative power of His love with everyone we can.
- g. Just like Isaiah, you are holy... you are forgiven... you are ready to step up and step out. Amen.