

Have you ever done spring cleaning, you know real spring cleaning where you get rid of all those clothes, shoes, kitchen items, tools, colognes, creams, lotions, things that you haven't used in over a year and just get rid of them. You can give them away, trash them, give them to the Goodwill, the Salvation Army, St. Vincent DePaul, and Volunteers of America. Have you thought about having a garage sale like they do on that program when they do over some fortunate person's house? What about bagging them up and bringing them to the church for the April rummage sell at Unity!

In our scripture this morning we meet Isaiah who is a scribe in Jerusalem. We know from his introduction Isaiah ministered during King Uzziah's reign according to Isaiah 1:1. Isaiah's vision of God was in the year that Uzziah died; therefore it occurred within the 12 calendar months before or after the king's death in 739 B.C. and could have been either shortly before or shortly after the king died.

The main point is the contrast between the human king and the divine King, God Himself and to some contrasts between Uzziah and Isaiah. In Uzziah's long 52-year, prosperous reign, where he was like a skilled President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Secretary of Agriculture, all in one! But many of his people did not seek the Lord and were involved in sin. By contrast, God is holy. In pride, Uzziah disobeyed and entered the temple and was struck with leprosy which made him ceremonially unclean. Proud Uzziah did not learn the lessons that we have examined for the last few weeks and did not understand that he had many gifts and talents, but he could not take on the task of the priests by actually burning incenses to God in the temple. Isaiah, on the other hand, was sensitive to sin. He was the one who said that he and his people were spiritually unclean. Although Uzziah was excluded from the temple and worship Isaiah was not.

Might it be that Isaiah could not truly worship because Uzziah was a "bigger than life" influence on Isaiah and the people of Israel? Is it possible that they had taken their eyes off God and thought their security, prosperity, and livelihood came from Uzziah rather than God? I don't know about you, but there have been times in my life that I have allowed someone to stand between me and God. Sometimes it was an intimate relationship like spouse or lover, sometimes it can even be parents or children, sometimes it is friends and other relatives, and sometimes it can even be people within the faith community. Anytime that a person or a thing or an activity

takes our eyes off the true source of our existence, we need to do some spring cleaning! But back to the scripture.

Three things struck Isaiah about God: God was seated on a throne, God was high and exalted, and the train of God's robe filled the temple. In the most holy place of the temple in Jerusalem, God's glory was evident between the cherubim on the atonement cover over the Ark of the Covenant. So it is understandable that some Israelites may have mistakenly thought that God was very small. They had forgotten what Solomon said when he gave the dedicatory prayer for the new temple, that no temple could contain God and that in fact even the heavens could not contain God. So when Isaiah came to worship that day he did not see God on the Ark of the Covenant, but on a throne. Isaiah saw God on the throne and therefore saw God as the true King of Israel, as one "high and exalted. "God wore a long robe showing God's royalty and majesty. God was seen in the temple being praised and worshipped by the host of heaven. God was not and is not interested in people that just go through the motions of worship, but as Jesus said "God is looking for ones that will worship in spirit and truth."

Those that Isaiah saw worshipping God were called seraphs, angelic beings. "Seraphs" is from the Hebrew word meaning "to burn". Some scholars think this suggests their flaming appearance and others think it possibly suggests that they had great zeal for the Lord. We know from the passage they had six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, showing their humility before God. With two wings they covered their feet, demonstrating their service to God. With two wings they flew. This may have something to do with their ongoing worship of God and their proclamation of God's holiness and glory. One thing Isaiah remembered was that one of the seraphs took a *burning* coal and placed it Isaiah's lip to clean and purify his lips of his sin.

We don't know how many seraphs were worshipping that day, but we do know they were proclaiming that the LORD Almighty is holy. In the Bible when something is said three times it usually means completeness, so they angels were singing that God is completely holy! The seraphs also proclaimed that His glory fills the earth; in that same way that God's robe filled the temple. Isaiah understood that as holy as God was and is, in the opposite end of the spectrum the people of Judah and he were unholy, even though they thought they were the holy people of God by virtue of the fact they were the seed of Abraham.

As the seraphs cried out, Isaiah felt the temple shake and fill with smoke. The thresholds were large foundation stones on which the doorposts stood. The shaking suggested the awesome

presence and power of God and the smoke may have been a reminder of the guiding cloud that led the Israelites in the wilderness during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. It is also believed that the smoke symbolized the glory of God that the priests in Solomon's day had seen when they dedicated temple.

As a result of this vision of God's majesty, holiness, and glory, Isaiah realized that he was a sinner. Isaiah was like Ezekiel, Job, Peter and John, when they saw God's glory they confessed their sins and responded with humility, asking for forgiveness. Even though Isaiah had previously preached woes on Israel for their disobedience and sinfulness, now Isaiah said Woe to me! He realized *he* was subject to that same judgment because he was unclean, the same as the people. Whenever we compare ourselves to the holiness and purity of God, we will see the impurity of human sin; our sin. Isaiah said his lips were unclean, meaning his attitudes, actions, and words reflected his sinful state. He saw that he was like the people around him. *Isaiah confessed his sins and* realized his impurity.

God cleansed him by having a seraphs touch Isaiah's lips with a hot coal . . . from the altar. We don't know whether this altar was the altar of burnt offering, or the altar of incense where incense was burned each morning and evening. However the action signified the removal of the prophet's guilt and his sin. Of course this is what the entire nation needed. The people of Judah needed to respond as Isaiah did, acknowledging their need of cleansing from sin. But unlike the prophet, most of them refused to admit they had a spiritual need. Though they, through the priests, burned sacrifices at the temple, their lives needed the purifying action of God's "fire" of cleansing.

The rest of this chapter deals with the message Isaiah was to preach to Judah. After hearing the seraph's words he then heard the Lord's voice. God asked, "whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

God seemed to have asked the question to give Isaiah, now cleansed, an opportunity for service. The prophet knew that the entire nation needed the same kind of awareness of God and cleansing of sin he had received. So he responded that he would willingly serve. He said "Here am I."

Now Isaiah was like most of us, he wanted to know how long this commission was for! He believed his serving the Lord would result in the nation's cleansing. However, the Lord told him his message would *not* result in much spiritual response. The people had not listened

before and they would not listen now. The Lord did not delight in judging His people, but discipline was necessary because of their disobedience. In fact the people, on hearing Isaiah's message, would become even more hard hearted against the Lord. Jesus quoted part of this verse to explain that Israel in His day *could* not believe because they *would* not believe.

Isaiah's response to the message implies that he was ready to speak whatever God wanted him to say. Yet he wondered how long he would have to go on delivering a message of judgment to which the people would be callous. The Lord answered that Isaiah was to proclaim the message until His judgment came, that is, till the Babylonian Exile actually occurred and the people were deported from the land. He was to preach until the people left their ruined cities and fields. God meant he should keep on preaching until God instructed Isaiah to stop, until only a tenth remained, referring to the poor who were left in Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah may have been discouraged by such a negative response and terrible results. However God assured Isaiah that not all was lost. A remnant would be left. God compared that remnant to stumps of terebinth and oak trees. From this stump or holy seed of a believing remnant would come others who would believe. Though Judah's population would be almost totally wiped out or exiled, God promised to preserve a small number of believers in the land.<sup>1</sup>

You may not have such an awe inspiring commissioning ceremony, but God has also called you to ministry.

1. Confess your sins.
2. Seek God's forgiveness and cleaning
3. Respond to God's call.
4. Be faithful in using your gifts in ministry.
5. Trust and depend on God.

So are you like me and need to do some spring cleaning so I and you can respond to God's call?

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<sup>1</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1044