

The Coal from the Altar

Slides 2-3 - Isaiah 6:1-8

1. Setting the stage
 - a. Slide 4 - Background & context - In the year that King Uzziah died (742 BC?)
 - i. Who was King Uzziah – good and bad (2 Chron 26)
 1. Did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. And because of that the Lord blessed him and helped him.
 2. Won some military victories and had a powerful army
 - a. 2 Chron 26: 13 – catapults and other innovative devices
 3. His fame spread as far as Egypt
 4. Reigned for 52 years
 5. Mistake was entering the temple to burn incense - leprosy
 - ii. Political situation- Assyria, Samaria, Israel
 1. Tiglath Pileser ascending the throne in Assyria in 745 BC (3 years previous)
 2. Pressure on Judah to make political alliances to secure the future. Either with Assyria (become their vassal), coalition of smaller nations, or Egypt
 - iii. Religious situation
 1. Outwardly they are doing things Yahweh requires
 2. They are also worshipping other gods
 3. Injustice and unrighteousness in the land
 4. Isa 29:13 - ¹³ The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.
 5. Spiritually complacent
 - iv. Isaiah’s vision comes at a time of great uncertainty and spiritual complacency
2. Slide 5 What did Isaiah see?
 - a. The True King
 - i. Lord (sovereign) No description of the Lord
 - ii. High and lifted up – he is the only truly exalted one.
 1. Israel filled with pride
 2. King of Babylon and Assyria – tools, Cyrus just a tool
 - iii. Throne, Train of His robe filled the temple
 1. Trappings of Kingly authority
 2. Fringe filled the whole temple
 - a. God is so immense that only the tiniest part of His garment can fit in the temple
 - iv. King, Lord Almighty
 1. He is the true King, not the one who died
 2. Hope for protection from enemies is in trusting the true King

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- b. **Slide 6** Seraphim
 - i. Throne guardians (Egyptian), flying serpents, Burning ones
 - 1. Further support for the “King” picture
 - ii. Rank – The Bible implies that there is some kind of rank among spiritual beings, but doesn’t anywhere lay out a comprehensive ranking system. People that have tried to rank spiritual beings generally rank the Seraphim at the top.
 - 1. Six wings
 - iii. Covering themselves because of the glory/holiness
3. **Slide 7** - What did Isaiah hear?
- a. Holy, Holy, Holy
 - i. Superlative (3 repetitions)
 - 1. One of the ways to show emphasis in Hebrew.
 - a. Eze 45:3-4 (Holy, Holy, Holy)
 - b. Eze 21:32 – Ruin, ruin, ruin
 - c. in the Hebrew Bible a quality is ‘raised to the power of three’, as if to say that the divine holiness is so far beyond anything the human mind can grasp that a ‘super-superlative’ has to be invented to express it and, furthermore, that this transcendent holiness is the total truth about God. Motyer, J. A. (1999). Isaiah: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 20, p. 81). InterVarsity Press.
 - 2. Only character quality of God done this way.
 - ii. Also, book of Revelation
 - iii. The Holy One of Israel
 - 1. 25 times in Isaiah, 7 times in the rest of the OT.
 - b. **Slide 8** What is holiness?
 - i. 1a - Separateness – belonging to the divine realm
 - 1. In other religions this included shrine prostitutes.(Gen 38:21-22)
Not an issue of morality or ethics
 - a. Israel is a Holy people regardless of behavior.
 - b. The Church – Royal priesthood, Holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9)
 - ii. 1b – Otherness, uniqueness, one of a kind, in a class all His own
 - 1. 2 categories of being - God and not God, created and uncreated
 - 2. God is unique from the greatest spiritual beings (Seraphim – had to cover themselves and they are the ones declaring His glory)
 - 3. Other gods are just firewood – Isa 44:15,17
 - 4. Other kings are just tools – Isa 10:12-19
 - 5. The only other being that is “high and exalted” is the suffering servant... Isa 52:13

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- iii. 2 - Moral and ethical purity and excellence
 - 1. Isa 5:16 - But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.
- iv. Holiness includes beingness (nature) as well as morality
 - 1. One picture of God that relates to holiness is that He is a consuming fire in His essence
 - a. Burning bush, fire and cloud at Mt. Sinai, Fire from the Holy of Holies in Leviticus, Isa. 33:14 – Burning fire, Jesus has eyes like blazing fire, feet like bronze glowing in a furnace and a face that shines like the sun in all its brilliance
 - b. Heb. 12:28-29 - let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.
 - 2. Volcano story
 - a. The volcano has done nothing wrong by being who it is.
 - 3. We have a human nature, God has a God nature. He will not change.
 - a. Humans have lungs, eyes, brains, etc.
 - b. Don't choose to grow an extra eye
 - 4. How can we dwell with burning fire (Isa 33:14)?
 - a. That's what Isaiah wondered...
- 4. **Slide 9** What did Isaiah say?
 - a. 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, YAHWEH Almighty
 - i. Woe - See chapter 5 and the woes he pronounced
 - ii. Unclean lips – Why lips?
 - 1. Prophetic calling personally, prophetic calling corporately
 - 2. Worship
 - 3. Verses that describe their uncleanness in terms of their mouths.
 - a. “honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me” Isa. 29:13
 - b. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness. Isa 59:3
 - b. I have seen the true king, YAHWEH of Hosts
 - i. Remembering that Uzziah was judged in the temple for being there inappropriately
 - c. Isaiah humbled himself and acknowledged his sin

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5. What did Isaiah experience
 - a. **Slide 10** The coal from the altar
 - i. Which altar?
 1. The incense altar is closer to the Holy of Holies, but
 2. Atonement, sin, guilt – these are all ideas in Leviticus related to the altar of burnt offerings.
 3. The incense altar probably got its coals from the main altar (Lev 16)
 4. Reversal of what happened to Uzziah – He was inappropriately at the incense altar and lost his calling, Isaiah is touched by a coal from this altar and is prepared for his calling.
 5. The key was the coal
 - ii. Touched his lips
 - b. The pardon
 - i. Not a pat on the back or a speech about self-image
 - ii. Acknowledgement – “your guilt, your sin”
 - iii. Atonement and removal of guilt and sin
 - c. Isaiah was powerless to do anything about his problem. But God was not powerless.
 - d. Then he could speak...
 - i. His clean lips allowed Him to speak with God as well as carry out his ministry
 - e. Revelation of God’s holiness, leads to a revelation of our own need, leads to humility and repentance, leads to forgiveness, cleansing, reconciliation and commissioning
 - i. Isaiah saw and perceived, heard and understood and responded with a humble heart. The people will see but not perceive, hear but not understand and have hard hearts.
 - f. **Slide 11** How can we dwell with burning fire?
 - i. Isa. 33:14 The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?” 15 Those who walk righteously and speak what is right, who reject gain from extortion and keep their hands from accepting bribes, who stop their ears against plots of murder and shut their eyes against contemplating evil— 16 they are the ones who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. Their bread will be supplied, and water will not fail them. 17 Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar.
 - ii. We have to change. We have to be re-made into a substance that is not consumed by fire. Precious stones and precious metal or fire itself.
 1. We have to be made righteous. For that, we must have an encounter with the coal....

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6. Conclusion

- a. We need a revelation of God, not just His love but also His holiness
- b. We need a revelation of our own sinfulness and also the sinfulness of our society.
 - i. It is easy to get complacent and to assume that if everything seems fine, then God must be OK with it.
 1. We are Christian enough... God doesn't appear to judge in "that way" any more...
- c. We need the solution and the salvation that only God can provide. We cannot save ourselves. Our only solution is the atonement that God provides, the encounter with the coal...
 - i. Other gods cannot save us, alliances with powerful humans, nations, corporations cannot save us. Science cannot save us.
 - ii. Our only salvation is the coal from the altar
- d. The coal from the altar -- Isa. 52:13-53:12

Slide 12 The Suffering and Glory of the Servant

13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness— 15 so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

53 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin (Guilt offering), he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

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11 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

- e. Jesus death on the cross is the coal from the altar that touches our lips, atones for our sin and removes our guilt. We are changed and transformed. This is what allows us to dwell with our Holy God, who is a consuming fire and everlasting burning. And our lips will be worthy to say, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God almighty, the whole earth is filled with His glory.

7. Notes:

- 8. The [NIDOTTE](#) says the triple repetition is either "extremely emphatic" or "a form of the superlative", and suggests it has Semitic features. I'll copy the section here:
- 9. *Implicit threefold unities are to be found in the ordering of right-middle-left ([Exod 14:29](#); [Num 20:27](#)), beginning-middle-end ([Wisd 7:17-20](#)), and heavens-earth-sea ([Ps 96:11](#); [Amos 9:6](#); [Hag 2:6](#); cf. Lev 11). Exact triple repetitions are rare and extremely emphatic ([Jer 7:4](#); [22:29](#)) or a form of the superlative ([Isa 6:3](#)). The use of three terms belonging to the same semantic field is a feature of Hebrew rhetoric ([Lev 26:15](#); [Deut 5:31](#); [6:17](#)). The Aaronic blessing has a triple structure and a threefold occurrence of the divine name ([Num 6:24-27](#)), and threefold linkage of words or phrases or grammatical sequences is common in both rhetorical prose ([Deut 6:5](#); [30:11-14](#)) and poetry ([Mic 6:8](#); [Nah 1:2](#)), the third element usually being the climax. The most reduced telling of a story or delineation of a cycle takes place in three sections (beginning-middle-end; cf. [Wisd 7:17-20](#)). The universe can be described by ternary as well as by binary sets of terms (e.g., heavens-earth-water, [Ps 96:11](#); [Amos 9:6](#); [Hag 2:6](#); cf. Lev 11). The tabernacle/temple has three main areas (Most Holy Place, Holy Place, court, [Exod 25-27](#); [1 Kgs 6](#)), corresponding to decreasing intensities of divine presence and increasing breadth of human access as one proceeds outwards.*

a.