

“WHERE IS GOD IN ALL THIS?”

Isaiah 6:1-8

THEME: When we may think things are out of control and hopeless, God is on His throne. **DATE:** 07/15/07

Dr. John Crocker, First Evangelical Free Church, Rockford, IL.

If you have invested anything in the stock market, last week was probably a good week for you. The Dow Jones Industrial average gained 283 points in just one day. If that made you happy, it probably didn't last long.

There's much more to life than what happens on Wall Street.

“Life is fired at us point blank.” (José Gasset)

We don't have the foresight to escape the parts of life we wish we could avoid.

“Life is made up of sobs and sniffles and smiles . . . with sniffles predominating.”

Has life been mostly smiles for you lately? It doesn't seem to stay that way for most people.

Some of you limped in here this morning—not physically, but emotionally or spiritually. Life is tough.

Maybe you're concerned about our church. It's not what it used to be.

Maybe your heart is heavy over whatever you're dealing with.

I want to encourage you today.

- For the prophet Isaiah life had turned very sour in the eighth century before Christ.

He prophesied in Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah, and he enjoyed the privilege of access to the king.

It was a troubling time in Israel's history. Judah was declining in power and influence. Society had become corrupt. People were cruel and unjust.

- It was the year that King Uzziah died. Uzziah had reigned in Judah for 52 years. While King Jeroboam II was ruling in the northern kingdom of Israel and Uzziah in Judah, the two kingdoms flourished. The combined territory of the Israelites once again reached as far as it had during the time of Solomon.

But Jeroboam had died three years earlier. And now King Uzziah was dead or dying (it was the year of his death).

He died in his own home where he had been quarantined after contracting leprosy.

Uzziah had been a good king. But he had usurped the priestly prerogative of burning incense in the temple of the Lord. When the priests confronted him in front of the incense altar, he became enraged. Immediately leprosy broke out on his forehead. Until his death his uncleanness disqualified him from entering the temple precincts. (2 Chronicles 26:16-21)

A good king had become proud, and God dealt with him.

- All the while the Assyrians were becoming stronger and stronger. Under Tiglath-Pileser III they had gained supremacy over the whole Mesopotamian region. The nations trembled.

It was just a matter of time and Judah would have to deal with Assyria.

King Uzziah died and his son Jotham became king. After Jotham died his son Ahaz became king of Judah. Ahaz was a pathetic puppet of the Assyrians. He shut the doors of God's temple and sacrificed to pagan Gods. He “provoked the Lord, the God of his fathers, to anger.” (2 Chronicles 28:25)

- The name “Uzziah” means “The Power of the Lord.” Was Uzziah's death a sign that the power of the Lord had left his people? I wonder if that thought haunted the prophet Isaiah.

The people feared that their nation would not survive.

Isaiah must have pondered, “Where is God in all this?”

- Does any of this resemble what you're dealing with? In your family or friendships or your business, have things been disintegrating? What about our church? Do you fear that something like this might be happening to us?

What should we do? Ask God to show himself to us in the midst of all that's happening. The Lord did that for Isaiah.

^{6:1} In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "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."

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

⁸ 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!"

If we turn our attention to God in our troubles and confusion and fears, we can learn some crucial **lessons** for life.

I. GOD IS STILL ON HIS THRONE (6:1)

Isaiah had a vision of the Lord God enthroned. This was not a dream induced by gastronomic excesses before he went to sleep.

This was a meeting of the Lord with the prophet. The Apostle John said Isaiah saw our Lord Jesus Christ in all his glory (John 12:41).

¹ *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.*

When everything around Isaiah the prophet was in disarray, when things were falling apart, when hope was fading, he saw the Lord.

When oodles of people were fretting and wringing their hands in fear, then the Lord God appeared to Isaiah in regal majesty, unruffled by events in Judah, and completely in charge.

- Isaiah had enjoyed a close relationship with King Uzziah.

But this vision of the Lord's glory eclipsed all the prior glory of King Uzziah on his throne. It was nothing in the light of the Lord's majesty.

Isaiah was overwhelmed by God's greatness.

When the greatest king of France, Louis XIV, died, his state funeral in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris was magnificent. The Bishop of Paris mounted the pulpit to give the eulogy and uttered just four words: "Only God is Great."

There are many times when we must say that too.

- Always remember this: God is never distressed or unnerved by our problems and crises.

One of the simplest and greatest truths is often sung to the strumming of a guitar and clapping of hands: "He's got the whole world in his hands."

- In reading this whole paragraph, I get the impression that the prophet Isaiah was in despair because the fabric of Judah was rotting before his eyes.

And that was when he saw a vision of the Lord.

- Has God ever broken in and made himself known to you in the middle of your heartbreak and hopelessness? Has God somehow assured you that he is there and he is in control?

Do you think we may see the Lord in the midst of our challenges as a congregation?

I doubt you'll get a dazzling display of his glory like Isaiah's vision. Maybe God will give it to you while you are praying, as the Holy Spirit speaks to your soul, or while you are reading God's word, or maybe through something someone says or does for you.

- Why is it that so many people see only the problem and they never see the Lord on his throne and in control?

Maybe they don't see the Lord because they don't really want to see the Lord. They just want to see their problem go away, their circumstances improve. That's what matters most to them, not seeing the Lord.

How do I know this? Because I struggle with this too. I want to see God fix things the way I want them fixed.

But God wants me to know that he is on his throne. I'm not on the throne. He is in control.

That's why I pray each day, very deliberately, "Thy will be done."

- God didn't change the circumstances. Uzziah stayed dead. Judah became a vassal of Assyria.

As you read through the Bible you will find that God doesn't change circumstances nearly as much as he changes people. That's what matters most to him.

- That tough situation you're struggling with right now—you want God to change the situation for you, but maybe God wants to change you in that situation.

The lesson the prophet Isaiah had to learn was that God is always on his throne, completely aware and in control.

[2nd lesson when we're afraid because things seem to be falling apart]

II. GOD STILL DESERVES OUR WORSHIP (6:2-4)

Isaiah was not worshiping when he saw the Lord. He was probably upset and very worried. (cf. v.5)

No matter what we are struggling with, and no matter how upset or confused we are, God will be worshiped, and we should join in. God deserves our worship.

² *Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.*

³ *And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

⁴ *At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*

This is the only place in the Old Testament where seraphs, or seraphim, are mentioned. They are heavenly beings who engage in perpetual antiphonal worship before God’s throne.

• Many times God had shown his power to Israel by defeating their enemies in ways that only God could do. God could have revealed his majesty to Isaiah and to all Judah by crushing Tiglath Pileser and the Assyrians. But God revealed his majesty by giving the prophet Isaiah a vision of worship in heaven.

God wanted his prophet, who was to speak to his people, to know this: God deserves worship in any and every situation.

• Isaiah was probably still more inclined to mourn for Uzziah than to praise the Lord.

Have you ever come to into a worship service with something like that going on in your head?—“I’m hurting, I’m upset. How can I worship right now?”

The vision of true worship arrested Isaiah. It was something he would never forget. It did a number on him! It melted him.

• Sometimes your soul may be so full of joy that worship is spontaneous. You don’t need anything to get you into a worshipful mood. It just erupts from your soul.

There are other times when you don’t feel like worshipping and you don’t see why you should. You’re too ticked off to worship.

But no matter how wrong and unjust you think things are God deserves your worship.

Sometimes it takes pure discipline to worship. Worship is not always easy because it must be real. It must come from your heart and soul. We must worship in spirit and in truth.

The worship God deserves does not depend on what’s happening to you.

That’s one of the lessons Isaiah learned. It’s a basic lesson for us as well.

• God is still on his throne. God still deserves your worship. None of your troubles or struggles exempts you from worshipping God.

I think that may be part of what is meant by a sacrifice of praise.

[3rd lesson when we’re afraid because things seem to be falling apart]

III. GOD IS STILL COMPASSIONATE (6:5-8)

When Isaiah had the vision of the Lord on his throne he was overwhelmed with a sense of unworthiness.

⁵ *"Woe to me!" I cried. "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."*

The seraphim were worshipping the Lord with clean lips. Isaiah confessed that he couldn’t do so. By saying his lips were unclean he meant his life was unclean.

He was guilty before the holy Lord God.

• No one who is aware of sin in his life can truly worship God. That’s true here this morning, or anywhere.

If you are deliberately doing something that you know is contrary to God’s will and you don’t want to stop, you don’t worship—even if you go through all the motions and you even feel good doing it. We can easily deceive ourselves.

• We don’t know what sins Isaiah confessed when he cried out, “Woe to me! I am ruined.”

Our Lord God was compassionate then and he is still compassionate. He cleanses those who admit before God that they are sinners and repent with genuine remorse, as Isaiah did.

⁶ *Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.*

⁷ *With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."*

Isaiah was cleansed after he confessed his sin. His guilt was taken away. His sin was atoned for.

• Have you been here, week after week, without being able to worship God? You know that nothing is going from your soul to God in worship. Nothing happens.

Do you need to humble yourself and cry out from your heart in prayer: “Woe to me! I’m unclean; I’m a sinner; I’m guilty before a holy, majestic, almighty God!”

Oh how I wish you would do that now, today. Then you’ll know what it’s like to worship God, for real.

- I can’t think of anything more important than that.

Nor could God. That’s why he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to come to suffer the penalty for all our sins, and to win the victory over sin.

- God is still compassionate. He invites you to confess the truth about yourself and to be cleansed and forgiven. Then you will be ready and able to do whatever God wants.

⁸ *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!"*

What an amazing change happened in Isaiah. He went from “Woe to me!” to “Here am I. Send me.”

He was ready to be a prophet, because prophets are sent by God with a message from God.

Isaiah was changed, from being disappointed, with sinful attitudes festering in his heart, to being renewed and cleansed and forgiven and made fit to be what God wanted him to be.

In compassion the Lord intervened in Isaiah’s life and cleansed him from his sin. Then he could refocus on what God had called him to do.

What’s that line Dr. Phil uses? “How’s it working for you?”

How’s it working for you with God? Is God completely out of the picture?

Are you overwhelmed by something that has happened recently?

Are you trapped in a dark struggle that’s been going on for years and your soul feels like a dry bone?

I’m going to pray that you will see the Lord today—not necessarily in the sensational way Isaiah saw him, but just as compellingly. When you do, you will want to confess, as Isaiah did, and you will receive God’s cleansing and renewal. Your whole life will become refocused.