

ISAIAH'S CALL AND MINISTRY

Monette was quiet as she knelt on a pillow. She had a difficult decision to make. *Lord, help me know the right thing to do*, she prayed silently.

Her close friend, Phyllis, was about to make a huge decision. Phyllis had found a partner to open a day spa. But this potential partner had ideas that seemed shady. She knew all sorts of contractors supposedly eager to help, but she didn't have details about their experience. Monette couldn't believe that her friend was preparing to take out a loan with a person she barely knew.

So far, she had kept her critical thoughts to herself. She wanted to see her friend succeed, and she seemed happy—so happy that she might not be thinking clearly. That was Monette's fear.

A few days later, her eyes fell upon James 4:17: "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." Monette knew that inaction was not an option.

Later that day, she was on the phone telling Phyllis the things she had noticed, urging Phyllis to slow down and ask more questions before partnering with someone.

"I'm glad you told me," said her friend. "You've given me a lot to think about."

Phyllis didn't say she agreed. But, as if a weight was off her chest, Monette felt relief for having shared hard news.

"Lord, I probably wasn't a perfect messenger, but thank you for helping me to share what my friend needed to hear."

1 When have you been a messenger for someone else? What was that like?

2 What does it feel like to deliver either good or bad news?

3 Have you ever felt that God was inviting you to join a "messenger service"? What might that entail?

¹ In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ² Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said,

Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: The whole earth is full of his glory.

⁴ And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

⁵ Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

⁶ Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: ⁷ And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

⁸ Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?

Then said I, Here am I; send me.

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, 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 seraphim 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!”

A Holy Calling

The text begins with a date, the death of Uzziah, whose reign as king of Judah ends in tragedy and illness (see 2 Chron. 26:16–21).

During his fifty-two years as ruler, Uzziah “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Kings 15:3), and his passing means uncertainty for the nation facing threats abroad.

But the heavenly temple of God opens to reveal a vision to Isaiah: God is in control. He is “high and exalted,” and nothing escapes His attention (Isa. 6:1). Isaiah beholds the almighty God sitting enthroned in the heavenly temple, with all kinds of sights and sounds around Him. Isaiah sees the Lord’s flowing robe filling the sacred space (v. 1); he sees servants of God with unusual shapes (v. 2); and he hears these angelic creatures extolling God’s holiness and glory (v. 3). Just the sound of their voices causes an earthquake, while smoke—representing God’s glory—fills the temple (v. 4).

Isaiah is overwhelmed by this majestic scene, and he becomes acutely aware of his own weakness and frailty. In ancient cultures, standing before the throne of an earthly king would be terrifying, and Isaiah is even more terrified to face the Lord of heaven. “Woe is me!” he cries, for he knows himself to be “a man of unclean lips” (v. 5). We don’t know whether or not Isaiah has a particular sin in mind. But he is an imperfect person facing a holy and powerful God.

In response to his recognition, God’s servant—one of these winged seraphim—flies to him carrying a burning coal (v. 6). The purifying heat touches Isaiah’s lips, and his sin is covered. The word *atone* can mean “to cover,” showing that Isaiah’s sins are removed in order to make him free to respond to God’s call. When God asks for a messenger, Isaiah accepts the role: “Here I am. Send me!” (v. 8). The very same unclean lips that felt unworthy in God’s presence would be used to carry God’s messages.

1 What kind of message is sent to Isaiah through this vision of God in heaven?

2 Why does Isaiah say “Woe is me!” in God’s presence?

3 Why might Isaiah feel unprepared to act as God’s messenger?

¹ In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

² Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD,

³ And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

⁴ Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, ⁵ Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.

¹ In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.”

² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ “Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ⁵ “Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.’”

From Sickness to Victory

Since Isaiah is willing to carry messages for God, he can be asked to share either good or ill tidings. In this case, the context several decades later is the middle of a war. The powerful nation of Assyria is trying to capture all the territory of Judah. At this crucial juncture, the king, Hezekiah, has become deathly ill (v. 1). According to the parallel text of 2 Chronicles 32:25, it is the sin of pride that brought trouble upon him.

Isaiah comes to the king with a message from God: *do not expect recovery*. Hezekiah does not question whether this is from God, and the king responds with a tearful prayer that asks God, “Remember” (v. 3). It might seem like an odd request to God, but this word often refers to God’s covenant faithfulness (see Gen. 8:1; Deut. 9:27; Lev. 26:45).

Hezekiah’s prayer is asking God to look with favor upon his rule, since Hezekiah has “walked faithfully and with wholehearted

devotion” (Isa. 38:3). He had broken down the places of idolatrous worship and followed God’s commands, unlike many kings before him (2 Kings 18:4–5). By facing the wall in prayer, Hezekiah shows that his request can only be answered by God.

God relents from the initial plan and message and adds fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah (Isa. 38:5). At the same time that God extends the life of Hezekiah, God also orchestrates a miraculous rescue for Judah and city of Jerusalem (see Isa. 38:6). The Assyrians would soon be forced to withdraw, thanks in part to the prayers and courageous leadership of Hezekiah.

1 How does Hezekiah respond to news that his sickness would lead to death?

2 Why might Hezekiah choose to pray with his face to the wall?

3 Why would God give Isaiah the first message, only to relent and give Hezekiah fifteen more years of life?



The brutality of the Assyrian king and his attacking army is shown by their own relief sculptures. In this part of an image depicting the capture of Lachish (a town of Judah), an Assyrian soldier is about to kill one of the captives.

Osama Shukir Muhammed/British Museum

A True Calling

As Christians, we're drawn toward a *calling* from God. We desire for our responsibilities at home, church, and even our jobs to hold heavenly weight. But sometimes the places we serve don't feel fulfilling—so we think, *Perhaps this is not my calling*. Or, a job is dull and monotonous, so *It can't be my calling*. Isaiah's example shows that God has something different to say about the roles we play. Turning our attention to God and surrendering our lives can point us toward a calling, no matter the context.

In the first example, Isaiah sees heaven opened, and all his earthly concerns put into perspective by the awesome vision of God's throne. Isaiah's sinfulness is a problem, but God heals him and empowers him to speak. In the second example, King Hezekiah is powerless to save himself. He needs God's intervention to preserve his life and save the nation. Both men—Isaiah, then Hezekiah—fulfill their vocation or “calling” by first demonstrating a willingness to turn to God.

Repentance, which means turning or changing our thinking, is central to finding our spiritual callings. It is the process of submitting to God's transformation. We must relinquish control of the narrative (whether finding the perfect job, marriage partner, or context to serve) and submit to God's leading. Ironically, it is often when we feel unprepared and powerless—when we lay our lives before God and confess our bent and broken ways—that we discover a new sense of mission. God always shapes our hopes and dreams into something more glorious than we would imagine for ourselves.

1 What are the sorts of responsibilities in our lives that we might surrender to God?

2 Do you think turning to God is a one-time act or a repeated practice in Christian faith? Why?

3 Does repentance make a larger impact on us or on others?

Surrendering to God's Transformation

As you consider the lesson for today, when each of the two characters submitted themselves to God's plan and purposes, ask God to show you any way that you might surrender to the calling He has for you.

What is one predicament or crisis that you need God's help to solve? What kind of transformation might God accomplish, if you were to surrender to His purposes for your life?

Key Text

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.
—Isaiah 6:8 KJV

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 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of September 8 through September 13

- Mon.** Psalm 145:13–21—An Everlasting Kingdom.
- Tue.** Matthew 3:4–12—A Call to Bear Good Fruit.
- Wed.** Acts 3:12–20—A Summons to Repent.
- Thu.** James 5:12–18—A Ministry of Care and Comfort.
- Fri.** Exodus 12:3–14—A Feast of Remembrance.
- Sat.** Deuteronomy 12:5–12—A Dwelling for God's Name.

Next Week: 2 Chronicles 30:1–9, 26–27

Next we will cover one of the bright spots in Hezekiah's rule as king. Come prepared to discuss the value of gathering in-person.