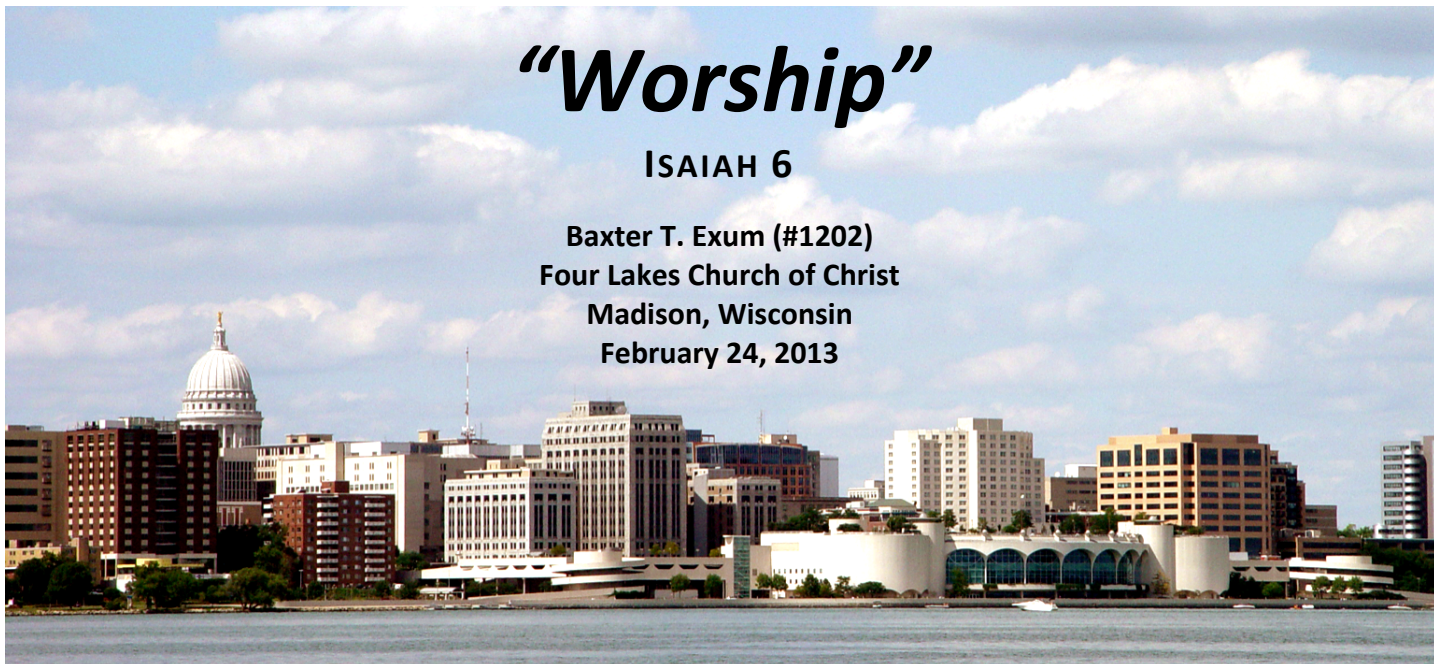


“Worship”

ISAIAH 6

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As we are gathered here this room together, I would like to ask whether we are missing out on anything by being here. I know that there are other things that we could be doing. Some of us could be working instead of being here this morning. Some of us could be in a dorm room or a university library getting ready for some kind of class or test tomorrow morning. Some of us could be at home with our families. Some of us could be out on one of our lakes drilling a hole through the ice. Some of us could be using this time to catch up on some cleaning or maybe some other chores around the house. Some of us could be using this time to catch up on some much-needed sleep after a difficult and busy week. And so the question (since we are here instead of somewhere else) is this: Are we being cheated? Are we missing out on something by being here instead of being just about anywhere else? And if we are, in a sense, missing out on something by being here, then why? What is our motivation for being here instead of being somewhere else? Why are we here?

For some, you might be here because it is a long-established habit...and habits are not necessarily bad. For some, you might be here because you are being forced to be here. Maybe your parents bring you here against your will. Maybe your spouse has cranked up the pressure a little bit, and you knew that life would be much easier for you if you showed up this morning as opposed to doing something else. I am reminded of a man who was enjoying a great night of sleep, but on Sunday morning his wife suddenly nudged him out of bed and said, “Hey, it’s time to go to church today! You’ve got to get out of bed!” The husband said, “But I don’t want to go to church this morning! Please, let me sleep in, just this once!” They argued for a bit, and finally, the wife said, “But you have to go to church this morning – you are the preacher!” And so the man eventually had to get out of bed. There are many things that might keep us away, so we get to the real question: Why are we here?

As we examine this question, I would invite you to turn with me to a powerful passage from the Old Testament book of Isaiah – Isaiah 6 (p. 1079). The prophet Isaiah lived from roughly 760-680 BC, and in fact, he was one of the greatest Old Testament prophets. He is quoted in the New Testament more than all of the other Old Testament prophets put together – what a tremendous honor! We know that Isaiah spoke out on God’s behalf in the declining days of the nation of Israel. And this morning, as we think about the value of worship and what we should expect when we worship, I would like for us to study one of the most powerful passages in the book of Isaiah – Isaiah 6,

¹ *In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. ² Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. ⁵ Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."*

⁶ *Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷ He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven." ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" ⁹ He said, Go, and tell this people:*

*Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
Keep on looking, but do not understand.
¹⁰ Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
Their ears dull,
And their eyes dim,
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts,
And return and be healed.*

¹¹ *Then I said, Lord, how long? And He answered,*

*Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant,
Houses are without people
And the land is utterly desolate,
¹² The Lord has removed men far away,
And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
¹³ Yet there will be a tenth portion in it,
And it will again be subject to burning,
Like a terebinth or an oak
Whose stump remains when it is felled.
The holy seed is its stump.*

What an interesting passage! As we look back at this chapter and as we let it sink in a little bit this morning, I would like for us to think about several lessons concerning our worship.

- I. **And one of the first things I'd like for us to notice is that WORSHIP IS NOT DESIGNED TO BE AN ESCAPE FROM REALITY; BUT RATHER, WORSHIP ALLOWS US TO DEAL WITH REALITY.**

Notice, please, the opening words, *"In the year of King Uzziah's death...."* That is a rather strange way to begin such a powerful chapter. It is strange, until we realize who King Uzziah really was. At the time of his death, King Uzziah had been ruling over Israel for almost 52 years, and this had been a time of great national

achievement, a time of great national pride. To put this in perspective, to put this in terms we can understand, think about who was president here in the United States 52 years ago. In February 1961, the president was John F. Kennedy. Now imagine that Kennedy had been president for the past 52 years. Today, he would be 96 years old. Now imagine having had 52 years of prosperity and military success and strength, and imagine what it would have meant to the nation to have the king die after such a long period.

We know from the Scriptures that King Uzziah became king at the age of 16 and he became one of the greatest kings of Israel. He strengthened the national defenses, he reorganized the army, he issued standardized shields and weapons to the soldiers, he issued body armor and bows, he built towers and forts to defend from invading nations, he built the army up to a fighting force of roughly 300,000 men commanded by 2,600 military officers. Not only that, but he built an amazing water system for the city of Jerusalem, a system that still exists there today. He began a spiritual reform. Things were looking up. This was a rather optimistic time for the people of Israel.

And yet near the end of his life, something happened. We studied this about a year ago, but in 2 Kings 15, King Uzziah became filled with pride and offered incense to God, even though he was not from the tribe of Levi. We read in that account that 80 priests tried to stop him, but he went ahead and did it anyway. God struck him with leprosy for his arrogance, and the king soon died a horrible death.

In a sense, tying this chapter to the death of King Uzziah gives us some context. It gives us a little bit of historical perspective. In other words, this is a real event. Isaiah did not say, "Once upon a time." But instead, he ties this chapter to something that actually happened. But in another sense, there seems to be a reason for this. The death of King Uzziah death was a national tragedy. It was a time of great mourning. Today, it might be like one of us saying that we worshiped God "in September 2001." Yes, in some ways that is just a date, but for most of us, when we cite that date, there is a reason for it. That month was a time of great national mourning, and anger and pain. We might say something similar in our own lives, "In the year that my good friend died, I worshiped God," "In the year that I lost my job, I worshiped God," "In the year that my child was diagnosed with some serious illness, I worshiped God," "In the year that my marriage fell apart, I worshiped God," "In the year that I lost my health, I worshiped God." This was Isaiah's way of putting his worship in context. There is a reason for that opening line. In the same way, when we worship God today, we are not avoiding reality, but we are bringing reality with us. When we assemble here in this room every Lord's Day morning, we bring our thoughts, and concerns, and fears. We bring our family issues. We take these things to God in prayer. We look for God's comfort and care. We worship in the middle of the life that we have right now. So, first of all, we do not come here to avoid life – we come here to deal with life.

II. **We notice a second aspect of worship in this chapter as we find that Isaiah was OVERWHELMED WITH A SENSE OF GOD'S PRESENCE.**

Notice Isaiah's description of what he saw, "***I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.***" He saw seraphim standing above the Lord. The word "***seraphim***" literally refers to the "burning ones." Other than that, we don't know too much about these creatures, other than the fact that they each have six wings. And in this passage, they are constantly calling out to one another, "***Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.***" The word "***holy***" means, "separate" or "set apart." So we have these beings calling out, "***Separate, Separate, Separate.***" The message there is that God is different. God is holy. God is on a completely different level than we are. And at the sound of that statement, as those words are repeated, we find that the entire temple trembled – the foundations and the door sockets shook – and the temple was filling with smoke.

Think about what an encouragement this must have been. Here was Isaiah going through a very difficult time, a time of national mourning, a time of transition, and Isaiah has this vision of God, the amazing power and majesty of God. In the middle of this difficult time, God was still on the throne. For Isaiah, life at this time was very uncertain, and yet in the middle of it, he has this vision and this reminder that God is in charge. Yes, the king is dead, but the King of Kings continues to reign in heaven. Worship, then, is a reminder that God is on the throne. When we worship, we remember. When we worship, we praise God for who He is. When we worship, we experience God. When we worship, God is with us. When we worship, we sing to God, we honor God, we pray to God, we read about God, we give to God, we bring our lives to God. We meet God.

I know that sometimes some people might think that we come to worship for ourselves, so that we can get something out of it. And yes, we do get something out of it, but the primary goal of worship is to honor God. We worship so that God gets something out of it. Worship is not meant to entertain us; but instead, worship is meant to honor God for who He really is. When we worship, we recognize God as being holy, separate, and awesome. Our response is awe. Our response to God is reverent fear or respect. Worship allows us to meet and honor God.

- III. **There is another aspect of worship in Isaiah 6, and that is: WORSHIP (OR BEING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD) HAS A WAY OF MAKING US AWARE OF OUR OWN SIN AND INADEQUACY. We might say that worship gives us an opportunity to do some self-examination. Worship allows us to do some confession.**

Notice what happens in verse 5: Isaiah sees the Lord, and his response is, ***“Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”*** Worship allows us to see God as He really is, and when we see God, we see ourselves for what we really are. It is so easy to compare ourselves to other people, but when we worship God, we see ourselves compared to perfection. And to Isaiah, that was a sobering thought. Compared to his neighbors, Isaiah might have been a pretty good guy, but when compared to God, Isaiah could see that he was truly ***“unclean.”*** We think of what Paul said in Romans 3:23, ***“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** Isaiah saw God’s glory, and he knew immediately that he fell far short of it. We think of what happened in our scripture reading from Luke 5. The Lord Jesus (a carpenter by trade) gave some fishing advice to some men who were commercial fishermen by trade. They had been out all night and hadn’t caught anything, but when they took the Lord’s advice, they caught so many fish that the boat was actually in danger of sinking, they had to call in help from other boats, and when Peter saw what had happened, ***“...he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!’”*** We might think that that is a rather strange response, but Peter could see that he was in the presence of greatness. He was in the presence of perfection, he was in the presence of God, and it caused him to confess his own sin, ***“Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!”*** That’s what happened to Isaiah. He was not worthy to stand in God’s presence, and that, of course, caused him to confess, ***“I am a man of unclean lips.”***

Someone might ask, “Why did God call a sinful man to preach His message? Why would God call a man of unclean lips?” And the answer is: There is no other type of person available to preach God’s message! The Lord God has not entrusted the message to perfect men, but to sinful men. And that is what is truly amazing about this passage. Isaiah saw God and confessed his sin to the Lord.

IV. **There is another aspect of worship we need to consider here, and that is: In the context of worship, GOD PROVIDED GRACE FOR ISAIAH’S FORGIVENESS.**

In verses 6-7, we find one of the seraphim taking a burning coal and pressing it on Isaiah’s lips and saying, **“...your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”** So, when we see God in worship, we see our own shortcomings and failures, but thankfully, God does not leave us there! How horrible it would be to worship God and then to leave with this terrible feeling about how bad we are. But instead, once we see our sin and openly confess it, the Lord allows for cleansing. The Lord provides forgiveness.

In the New Testament, we think of what Paul said in Romans 6. When we are buried with Christ in baptism, the old self is dead and gone, and we are raised up to walk in **“newness of life.”** That is good news! In worship, we praise God for hope and forgiveness! And even after we obey the gospel, even when we sin, God still has a plan. We think about 1 John 1:9, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** In worship, then, we thank God for his amazing grace. We confess and God forgives. What a blessing! One reason we worship, then, is to experience God’s forgiveness. We need to hear the same message Isaiah heard, **“Your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”**

V. **As we come near the end of our time together this morning, there is something else we need to think about in this chapter, another benefit of worship, another consequence of worship, and that is: AS WE WORSHIP, WE ARE CHALLENGED TO DO SOMETHING – WE ARE SENT OUT ON A MISSION, WE ARE CHALLENGED TO SERVE.**

Notice in verse 8: For the first time in this chapter, the Lord speaks, and when he speaks, the Lord says, **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?”** And with that, Isaiah does not ask, “Where are you sending me?” He does not ask, “What is the salary for this particular mission?” He does not ask, “Is it safe?” He does not ask, “How much will it cost?” But instead, Isaiah simply says, **“Here am I. Send me!”** And what I love about this is that God did not have to beg. God did not have to run an announcement in the bulletin for several weeks. He did not beg and plead. He did not threaten. He did not resort to some form of guilt. But instead, the Lord says that he needs to send someone somewhere, and Isaiah steps forward and basically says, “I don’t care what I need to do, or where I need to go, or what this mission might cost, but I am willing to do whatever You need me to do” [paraphrased]. **“Here am I. Send me!”** **“Here am I,”** by the way, is the same one-word response given by Abraham when he dropped the knife as he was about to offer his son on the altar when the angel stepped in. It is the same response Moses gave when God called out to him from the burning bush. And it is the same response given by the young man Samuel when he heard the Lord calling his name at night. **“Here am I.”** I am here, and I am ready to do whatever you need me to do.

And the command to Isaiah is rather strange as we can see from the rest of this chapter. We have God sending Isaiah as a messenger to a nation that will refuse to listen. These people will not care. Isaiah, of course, responds in verse 11, **“Lord, how long?”** In other words, “I am ready and willing to go, but I’m just curious: How long do I need to keep this up?” And we have the Lord’s answer in the last three verses. The Lord basically says: The people will not listen, but that is not your problem! The people will not listen, but you need to keep on preaching – until every city is wiped off the face of the earth, until every last person has been destroyed, until there is no trace of humanity left in the land – keep on preaching! And then, the tiny ray of hope comes in verse 13 – keep on preaching, because there are at least a few who will listen. And so apparently, there will be a small remnant to carry on. Long after Isaiah had gone on to his reward, there was a holy seed that would be left. That right there is a reference to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ would come through the nation of Israel.

At this point, Isaiah apparently goes back and preaches God's message for the rest of his life. I would ask: How are we doing? In the New Testament, God has commissioned us to teach, even if the people around us might not be listening. Our job is to tell people about the God we worship. Yesterday, Keola and I went up to UW Hospital to visit a woman who is struggling with cancer. There is pretty much no hope of a cure, but this woman is a Christian. I know the story, but I wanted to hear it from her again. Her name is Lisa, so I asked her, "Lisa, how did you first learn about the Lord's church?" Back in the summer of 1995, Betty, a new Christian from the church in Janesville went to Lisa's garage sale looking for a little table. Betty bought Lisa's table, and at some point in that transaction, Betty started talking to Lisa about baptism. Lisa came to church, and I had the privilege of baptizing her just a short time later. I remember: It was on a Tuesday evening. The point is this: Lisa is now a Christian and has the hope of going to be with God in heaven because when Betty first obeyed the gospel, Betty's attitude was, "Here am I. Send me!" And yes, it is true: Many people will not listen; however, we have to believe that there are more Lisa's out there – men and women searching for the truth who simply need someone to speak up and say something.

And that is one benefit of worship: We are challenged to do something. We are sent out on a mission. We see our own sinfulness, we see God's grace, and we make ourselves available to do whatever God wants us to do.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would just make one quick note on this being who sat on the throne, the being whose glory filled the temple. We might assume that this is a reference to God the Father. However, there is an interesting little verse in John 12, a time when John was talking about the Jewish people and how they had a tendency to not listen to the message that Jesus was preaching. John quotes this passage, and speaking of Jesus, John says, ***"These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him"*** (John 12:41). The ***"Him"*** in that verse is a reference to Jesus. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus. 700 years before the Lord was born, Isaiah spoke of Jesus, ***"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." "My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."***

This morning, we have studied some of the benefits of worship. Why are we here instead of at home? Why are our college students not in their dorms studying for tomorrow's test? Why are we here instead of at work? Why have we made worship a priority? We are not here to avoid the painful realities of this life, but we are here to remember that in all situations no matter what may happen, God is still on the throne. We are here to be made aware of our own sin and God's grace. And we are here to be sent out on a mission for God – recommitting ourselves to doing whatever God wants us to do.

Our mission here in Madison is to let people know about the good news. We might share it with a stranger at a garage sale, we might share it with a good friend over dinner, we might share it with a coworker – but that is our mission. The good news is that the King has paid the price for our sins. We respond to the King's offer by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, let us know. If we can pray about some situation in your life right now, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, please let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com