

Channels of the Holy Spirit

Isaiah 6 vv 1 – 8

When I read the passage for today I felt so excited by the opportunity to study it in more detail and share my findings with you! I felt that God had something that He wanted to use me to share with you.

V1 – ‘In the year that king Uzziah died ...’ Why did Isaiah mention that he had this vision in the year that the king died? Was this significant or was it just a ‘time marker’ that Isaiah used to allow us to place the time of this vision? I found that it is commonly believed that this IS a time marker. Isaiah had many different visions during his life and this significant one is marked clearly in history in the way that the chapter is begun. Some scholars’ think that this vision marked the **beginning** of Isaiah’s ministry for God, but others believe that Isaiah had had prophesies from God before this, and this vision marked a **change** in His ministry.

V1 ‘.....I saw the Lord...’ I assumed the Lord referred to God but some scholars, and indeed the apostle John believed that the one enthroned in this vision was the risen king Jesus.

John 12 verse 41 ‘Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about Him.’

The Lord was ‘seated on a throne, high and exalted...’ These words tell us of risen, conquering Jesus, now enthroned as King of kings in Heaven – above ALL powers, kingdoms, authorities.

It is very interesting that the POSITION of this king is mentioned, His robes and seraphs, BUT there is no description of the Lord at all. This makes this vision very different from other detailed visions of the Lord mentioned in the bible.

Ezekiel 1 verses 26 – 28 ‘...what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be His waist up He looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down He looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded Him....’

Daniel 10 vv 5- 10 ‘I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around His waist. His body was like chrysolite, His face like lightning, His eyes like flaming torches, His arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze,.....’

Rev 1 verse 13 – 16 ‘...and among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man’ dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters.’

And there are more...

I believe that the purpose of this vision was to establish to Isaiah the power and authority OVER ALL ELSE and the holiness – separateness- far different than any other holy thing, was the Lord whom he was serving. This served to embolden Isaiah in the ministry that God had for him.

V1 '... And the train of His robe filled the temple.' What was the significance of mentioning Jesus train? The length of an earthly king's robe at that time depended on the number of victories He and his army had won over other kings. Once the enemy had been defeated, the victorious king would walk through the battle field with his men, collecting plunder for themselves. When they came across the dead king, the king would cut off a piece from the bottom of the dead king's robe and later have it sewn onto the bottom of HIS robe. The more battles won, therefore, the longer the king's robe would be. A sign of the kings power and might.

The Lord mentioned in Isaiah had a robe whose train FILLED the temple. At this time, the temple referred to in Isaiah's vision was the temple at Jerusalem. Here, Isaiah is believed to have had this vision. The temple was a visual sign to the Israelites of God's earthly home with His people. It was the place the people went to daily meet with God, worship Him, make amends for their sins and pray to Him. It was at this time a huge building, and in this vision the Lord's train FILLED it! How mighty and powerful the Lord showed Himself to be to Isaiah.

For us redeemed Christians by Jesus death and resurrection, the temple represents any place where Christians are today – in other words THE WHOLE WORLD and Jesus' train fills it all; He has defeated Satan, sin, and death and IS King of all kings; He is the ALL POWERFUL king, the undefeated King, the ALMIGHTY king still today! The temple has always been a place where people come, just as they are to meet with God, with their failures, inadequacies, doubts and fears. For us today it can be in our home/car/church/the street/garden/anywhere. Jesus' death allows us to walk right into the holiest place, where God sits, – Father Son and Spirit to be with Him!

V2 'Above Him were seraphs ...' This is the only place in the bible where 'seraphs' are mentioned in this way. The word 'seraph' means 'burning ones' and is mentioned elsewhere in the bible to describe snakes, because their venom can make the sufferer feel like they are burning up inside. It is thought that the word 'seraphs' is used here because the beings in the vision had a burning bright appearance. Many scholars believe that the seraphs mentioned here are in fact the same as the 4 living creatures seen in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 1 v 5) and John's vision in Revelation chapter 4 v 6b.

I wondered why the seraphs were said to be 'above Him' but a better interpretation of this is to say that they surrounded Him – were round about Him.

V2 '.....each had 6 wings: with 2 wings they covered their faces...' The 6 wings mentioned represents the readiness and speed with which the seraphs could respond to Jesus' will – not relying on 2 wings but 6!

The seraphs used 2 of their wings to cover their faces when they were in Jesus' presence. This denotes their reverence, awe and humility when in His presence, the realisation of their shame, perhaps, when in the presence of Jesus? These seraphs, spent night and day in Jesus' presence, surrounding His throne, but had not become immune to His holiness and majesty and still covered their faces. This should cause us to reflect on how WE come into His presence.... How often do we rush in thoughtlessly and irreverently, without proper regard to WHO we are approaching. We, who believe in Jesus as God's son who died and rose again for us, can call ourselves Gods children – we have the right to call God Dad BUT must also remember who this Dad is.

When God spoke to or revealed something of Himself to others in the bible look how they instinctively responded –

Exodus 3 v 6 (God speaks to Moses in the burning bush) 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses HID HIS FACE, because He was afraid to look at God...'

1 Kings 19 v 13 (God passes in front of Elijah) '...after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, He PULLED HIS CLOAK OVER HIS FACE and went and stood at the mouth of the cave.'

Ezekiel 1 v 28 (Ezekiel's vision of God) 'This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown...'

Daniel 10 v 7 – 9 (Daniel's vision) 'I, Daniel was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard Him speaking, and as I listened to Him I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.'

Rev 1 v 17 (John's vision of Heaven) '... when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead.'

Isaiah 6 v 2 '...with 2 (wings) they covered their feet...' The expression used here is thought to denote not just the covering of their feet but of their lower body – illustrating modesty, reverence, the concealment of themselves as beings not worthy to be in Jesus' presence – their nothingness compared with Him.

'and with 2 they flew.'

Isaiah 6 v 3 'And they were calling to each other: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole Earth is full of His glory.'" In saying 'Holy' 3 times the seraphs emphasise the separateness – the holiness of Jesus compared to any other holy thing. He isn't simple HOLY – set apart as perhaps a pastor is or a vessel used in communion for example is. He is HOLY, HOLY, HOLY – incomparable to anything and anyone. Completely separate regarding His purity, authority, might, power, majesty....

Repeating 'Holy' three times is a hint of the 3 in one God – Father, Son and Spirit.

V4 'At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.' If this is the effect of the seraph's declaring Jesus' holiness – what is the effect of the voice of the risen Jesus Himself?! Imagine the effect in Heaven and Earth and under the Earth when we declare God as holy, holy, holy and ask Him to come to help us. Are there things in our lives that we feel powerless to control or affect?

So what was Isaiah's response to seeing the risen Jesus enthroned and lifted high?

V5 '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.' In the presence of holy Jesus, Isaiah's foulness was illuminated and He was overwhelmed by the uncleanness of himself.

Recently I spent time cleaning our house, Hoovering round, washing paintwork and cleaning the windows. I sat down to inspect my work with a self-satisfied sigh. The sun came out as I was looking round – illuminating the cobwebs in the corners that I had missed and the smeary windows that my efforts had created! My efforts to clean couldn't completely rid the house of muck and dust. Time and again, as we have seen in Moses, Daniel, Elijah and Ezekiel we see a similar effect on man when they meet with God. We start out on our feet and end up on the floor or with our faces covered as we are confronted with our sin, illuminated in His presence.

Unless we spend time with God – reading the bible, learning about God's holiness, following God's ways, listening to Him, singing songs to Him, praying, we may never get a picture of His holiness and our UNHOLINESS. This realisation was an important part of what followed for Isaiah and was instrumental in enabling God to use Isaiah in the future. It is essential to us too. We must acknowledge our sinfulness, and our complete inability to be 'good enough' in this life in our own strength. We also need to recognise God's holiness and purity and fall on our faces trusting in His mercy and forgiveness that Jesus freely offers us through his death and resurrection.

V6 'Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which He had taken from the altar...' The altar here is thought to be the altar of incense which was used daily after the morning and evening sacrifices had been offered. The coals used to light the fire for this altar were taken from the altar of burnt offerings, where the priests offered the animal sacrifices bought by the people to atone for their sins. The incense burnt here represented the prayers of the people rising up to God. But the altar could only be used AFTER atonement when the people were made right with God.

Isaiah had recognised his unworthiness to be in Jesus' presence and was mortified by his sin. Immediately a seraph took a coal, which represents Jesus' death for us all – the ultimate and final sacrifice necessary for all time, which cleanses us from our sin over and over and over again.

V7 'With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'" The seraph touched Isaiah's LIPS – the part of the body that Isaiah had mourned about in verse 7 – and he was cleansed! Made right before God!

In John 1 verse 9 it says 'If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' The cleansing and restoration that was given to Isaiah is offered to us too – if we first admit, acknowledge, own up to our wrongdoing, our mistakes, our deliberate sinfulness! The removal of our sin is essential to our being able to speak to God with confidence and comfort as we pray and listen to what He is saying to us.

The story is told that one day Henry Ford was out driving and he came across a man whose Ford car had broken down. Mr Ford stopped his car and got out offered to have a look at the car. The man, not recognising Mr Ford, agreed and was astounded when Mr Ford quickly fixed the car. The grateful man said, 'I am amazed that you fixed my car so easily!' Mr Ford replied, 'I ought to be able to fix it; I am the one who

designed it!' The same is true of us – God designed and made each of us and it was His will to fix all that was and is wrong and sinful with us.

V8 'Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'" It was only AFTER Isaiah had acknowledged his sinfulness and received cleansing that God called him to work for Him. Can you see the importance of acknowledging your sinfulness in God's sight? God's call to Isaiah here is unique. In other places in the bible God COMMANDS people to do something for Him, but here Jesus asks for a VOLUNTEER. Note the phrase '..who will go for US?' This indicated again the triune God – Father, Son and Spirit.

V8 'And I said, 'Here I am. Send me!'" Isaiah, restored, cleansed and in Jesus' presence doesn't look around to see if a seraph would respond to Jesus call or if another was there. He immediately volunteered – 'Send me!' Following this vision Isaiah was never the same as he was before. He became one of the greatest Old Testament prophets and God gave him the task of prophesying about the coming Messiah. Isaiah told us more about the life of Jesus than any other prophet and he wrote about it 700 years before it actually happened!!

What would you do if God called you to something or away from something? What would your response be? Could God be calling you today? Is He calling you to something or away from something? What will your response be?

St Andrews have been looking at the importance of the Holy Spirit to Christians as they live the Christian life. The Holy Spirit, the bible tells us, is the one who helps us to see our sinfulness and our need for forgiveness. He helps us to see holy, holy, holy God and, when we have acknowledged our sinfulness and received God's forgiveness – the Holy Spirit, that is the spirit of God, comes to live inside us to help us live as God wants us to live and do the things that He has planned and made us for.