

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

Sermon Title: "God's Calling, So Jump to It" (One More Sermon on the Amount)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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{SLIDE 1} Two months ago I got the letter. The State Court of Henry County was calling me to jury duty. Those who have served jury duty know that you have to reply to the letter. You cannot ignore it and throw it away. The court demands a reply. If not, they will send a police officer over to make you reply or send you to jail.

I don't know about you, but jury duty is something I do not wish to do. I have served on two juries in the past, and that was one too many juries to serve. I know it is every American's civic duty to serve on a jury when called. Even the United State Courts website says, "Jury service is one of the most important civic duties you can perform. The protection of rights and liberties in [all] courts largely is achieved through the teamwork of a judge and jury."¹ I wish it didn't apply to me. When I got the call two months ago, I wished I could have chosen not to answer it. Let somebody else have my space.

¹ <http://www.uscourts.gov/services-forms/jury-service>.

{SLIDE 2} Isaiah receives a call. A letter doesn't come to him in the mail. The call comes to Isaiah through a vision. He says that he saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. He might have been actually looking at the sky and have seen it open to him, and amid the clouds he could have seen a figure, who is the Lord, sitting on a royal chair.² It would be wonderful to see heaven opened to us. Maybe the closest we get to it would be to view the Aurora Borealis, which is the northern lights that appear closer to the North Pole than top the Equator.

{SLIDE 3} Isaiah describe heaven being like a temple with seraphim nearby. These are angelic creatures that have six wings. Four of those wings cover their faces and feet, while the other two allow the seraphim to fly. The whole time they are praising God. They are chanting, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of host; the whole earth is filled with God's glory."³ It is a highly worshipful moment. God is in view. God is lifted up in glory. Heaven is full of light and power.

But then Isaiah seems to understand the gravity of the situation. He seems to be in his house, and that house is shaken violently when a voice from heaven cries out. The posts of the doors are shaking to the

² Cf. Ezekiel 1:1.

³ Isaiah 6:3.

point of crumbling to pieces, and the entire living quarters fills with thick smoke. Isaiah begins to panic. He realizes that he has seen God, and nobody is allowed to see God directly. God is too vast, God is too wonderful for our limited minds to comprehend. There is a reason why the seraphim angels cover their eyes with two of their wings. They too cannot look directly at God.

So Isaiah panics, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man with unclean lips...”⁴ Why is Isaiah so concerned with his lips? If we saw God directly, wouldn’t we be more concerned with our eyes? Wouldn’t we be concerned with our brains frying like an egg on a skillet? Isaiah attaches his unclean lips with his moral corruption.⁵ It isn’t what you do, it is also what you say. And it seems Isaiah is saying that words are most important. Words make a person. If a person lies all the time, then he or she is viewed as an untrustworthy person. If a person says one thing and says something opposite, or even doesn’t say something opposite, the person is a fraud. Words matter. Words make a person, or they unmake a person.

Isaiah seems to say that his lips are unclean and

⁴ Isaiah 6:5.

⁵ John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah*, cf. 125; and J. Alec Motyer, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Isaiah*, cf. 82.

the people he lives with also have unclean lips, and thus all of them are sinners who cannot be in the presence of God. God cannot put up with such behavior. So, Isaiah must be undone. He must be finished. God's voice will shake apart his house, and God's voice will also shake apart Isaiah.

{SLIDE 4} However, not is all lost. One of the six-winger seraphim flies down to Isaiah and places a hot coal on his lips, which was taken from the altar in heaven. The coal instantly removes all his guilt. It removes all his sinfulness, and makes him righteous before God. In the Old Testament, God uses fire to burn things away, especially things that are unnecessary and unholy. Fire is destructive but it is also cleansing. Fire is frightening but it is also fascinating. The burning coal, as it comes from God's altar, "encapsulates the ideas of atonement, propitiation, satisfaction, forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation."⁶ Isaiah is not undone; he is remade. Isaiah doesn't have unclean lips in common with everybody else; he has restored lips to speak the things of God to people who desperately need to hear and see God. The seraph assures him that he is "good to go." He is ready to be what God wants him to be.

⁶ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, cf. 129; and J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, 82.

{SLIDE 5} Answering a call of God can be a scary thing. We believe our faith is comfortable as it is. We believe in God. We have faith in Jesus Christ. We trust the work of the Holy Spirit. But then, the Holy Spirit taps us on the shoulder. God calls us to do something for him. We panic. We deny. God cannot be calling me to do this or that. No way God wants me to do such and such a thing. The comfortable foundations of our faith are shaken. Faith to us feels like it is falling apart. We panic. We deny. We might even ignore.

I have heard the stories before. People have told me that they have been carrying out some ministry for years, and they couldn't believe they were still doing that ministry. "God told me that I could do this, and I said, 'That is not possible. That is not my gift, God.' And God said, 'Yeah, right, tell me another one.'" How many times do we think that we don't have the gift to do something for God, and yet God calls us to it anyhow? God knows us better than we realize.

Years ago my wife Tamara thought that music was all she would do in the church. There was a chance to teach little children in Sunday School and nobody else was taking on that task. So my wife took it on, and

discovered that she has a ministry for little children, which she enjoys. In my last church there was a woman who would tell me, “I’m not a leader. I am not a leader. I am a follower. Just tell me what to do. But I am NOT a leader.” She went through a series of lessons on prayer that I put together for a number of people, and she discovered that God wanted her to be a leader. She reluctantly became an Elder of the church (“But I told you, Pastor John, that I am not a leader”), and could come up with great ideas like anybody else.

{SLIDE 6} A call from God can throw us into a panic. We may feel we are not prepared for such a call. We may think we have to be smarter or more spiritual. Just like Isaiah in Chapter 6, we may say to God, “But I am a person with unclean lips, living in a world of unclean people. I am too sinful to be one of your disciples.”

And yet, God is still calling us. God is still showing us a certain ministry he wants us to carry out. God doesn’t say, “Oh, you’re too sinful? Okay, well, I’ll talk to somebody else.” God doesn’t say, “Oh, I didn’t realize you do not have the gifts for such and such a thing. Sorry to trouble you.” Then God leaves. God knows us through and through. God knows we are

capable of and what we are not capable of. And if we don't realize we are capable of something, God will make us realize we are capable.

{SLIDE 7} For Isaiah it was a seraph taking a hot coal from the altar and touching it to the prophet's lips. For us it is a reassurance from the Holy Spirit that God is our Father, we are his children. We are disciples and Christ is our example. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, the Spirit tells us.⁷ God is with us, even up to the end of the age, the Spirit says.⁸ God is able to forgive us and restore us always, the Spirit says. So now, answer the call. God is calling us to do something, so answer it.

God is calling us to do something with our tithe – God knows we are able to do it. God is calling us to do something with our talent – God believes we are capable of serving. God is calling us to do something with our time – God trust we are gifted to use our time wisely for God's kingdom. Do not be afraid. Do not panic. Everything is fine. God doesn't call us, unless God already believes we can do something. God sees the potential that is already stored within us. God just wants that potential to be released. God desires for us to serve in some way, and to do such ministry is joy.

⁷ Cf. Philippians 4:13.

⁸ Cf. Matthew 28:20.

Answer the call.

{SLIDE 8} Notice how Isaiah responds to God's call. God's booming voice calls out. It makes us wonder if it is still shaking the posts of the doors in Isaiah's home. Is the room still filled with thick smoke? God says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" An invitation is offered to Isaiah. A call is offered, and God expects his selected servant to receive it. And Isaiah does: "Here I am, send me!"

Do we see a problem here? If somebody offers you to do something, wouldn't you like to know what it is? Wouldn't you like some specifics about it? How many times has a friend approached us and said, "I need your help." We always reply by saying, "Yeah, sure, *what is it you want?*" We never say "Yeah, sure," without getting the details. We don't say, "Yeah, sure," and just go do it. We will be generous toward our good friend, but we always ask about the "job" itself. We want specifics.

Isaiah doesn't ask for specifics. He just says, "Here I am, send me!" Would we be so trusting? Wouldn't we want somebody to give us a road map or blueprints before going off on some adventure?

This is the other reason why we may not answer

God's call to do whatever. We want the blueprints placed before us. We want to see the map and calculate what we have to do and where we have to go. The initial arguments would be: "We might think ourselves unprepared," "We may think ourselves too sinful," "We may think ourselves ungifted." But if those arguments don't work, we then say that we need to know exactly what we are doing. If not, we won't answer any call.

Isaiah didn't ask for blueprint or maps. God called him to do whatever, and he simply said, "Here I am, send me!" Whatever the ministry would be, God would eventually give him the road map. The blueprints of the operation would be present in due time, according to God's will. And they were. We didn't read the passages from the rest of Isaiah 6, but God tells him to speak to the people with unclean lips.⁹ "The people see but they don't understand. The people see but they do not grasp. Their hearts are dull; their ears are heavy. The people will see a whole bunch of disaster coming their way due to their unfaithfulness to God. Yet, redemption would come afterward. Restoration may still come to a people with unclean lips.

{SLIDE 9} The same can be said about Jesus' first

⁹ The following generally comes from Isaiah 6:9-13.

disciples.¹⁰ All they were doing was fishing, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. Doing the job they did every day practically. Jesus approaches and says, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” Off they went, Simon Peter and Andrew. No asking for directions. No complaining that they were not good enough. James and John were also fishing. Jesus called them. They responded, “Here I am, Lord, send me,” and off they went.

When God calls us, do not expect God to come with us with plans in hand. They will come to us in God’s timing. They might be offered all at once in the beginning. They might be offered to us over time, a piece here and a piece there. Know that God has plans for us. God has already mapped out the ministry. Are we going to get on board with what God is doing and do wonderful things for his kingdom?

Rick Warren says that everybody has a gift. If you are a Christian, you have a gift. Everybody is a “10” in some area of ministry.¹¹ Not all but some area. God is calling us to do something: Share time, share talents, share tithe. Jump to it. We know our answer shouldn’t be filled with excuses. It should just simply

¹⁰ Cf. Matthew 4:18-22.

¹¹ New Membership *CLASS 101* syllabus, 13.

be, “Here I am, send me!” God will lead us forward.