

“Revealed and Called”

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Poor Isaiah, I mean really. I know it's hard sometimes when you read eight verses to get a full grasp of what in the world is going on. But poor Isaiah was in a pickle. God had called him to tell the people in Judah...

(Now, you have Judah in the southern part of Israel, and then you have Israel which was the northern kingdom. Right above that you have Assyria, and at the time it was huge. They were the powerful group. The Assyrian army was vile, filthy and cruel. They were like the Nazis of the ancient world at that time. They had an army that was greater than all others; so Judah, in the south, was scared because Assyria and Israel had been talking, trying to form an alliance, perhaps against Judah.)

...In the midst of all of this political intrigue God calls Isaiah in the temple. So Isaiah goes into the temple. There on the throne is the Almighty God and all of these gargoyle-looking things, with wings and talons. It was a frightening event. Of course if you are that scared - because if you have the power of Almighty God and all of these other creatures running around - then Isaiah did what anyone would have done: fell on his knees and said, "I'm unworthy." And instead of going, "Yea, you are right. Poof! Find somebody else," God says, "I will make you worthy." He does it through worship.

Now, I sometimes get frustrated when I hear other churches picking on the mainline [denominations]. I can see that they have a different theological bent than we do. That is fine - have at it. But what kind of burns my bacon is when people who use contemporary worship start pointing the finger at us saying, "Your worship isn't really meaningful, all you're doing is reading out of the bulletin. You sit down and you stand up, and you sit down and you stand up." Ugh. They are the same group that often blames us for not being biblical. Now, go back and read what happens in the temple with Isaiah. It wasn't contemporary worship, while they raised their hands and listened to cute little praise music.

Listen to the order of the worship that God shares with Isaiah, and see if it rings a bell for you.

First of all, when Isaiah drops to his knees, they do a Prayer of Confession and so making Isaiah even lower. Then, at the moment when Isaiah thinks there is no [place] lower that he can get, there is a Declaration of Pardon. For God reminds Isaiah that God will take care of him, that God will make him worthy. "You may be unworthy, but I will make you worthy. Come forward, let's continue in prayer and then we will share the word of the scrolls." In that time, it was the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. Then someone interrupted the Scripture - kind of like a sermon. There was an offering taken as a response to the word shared. Does that sound familiar? Kind of like our bulletin?

It was out of worship that Isaiah received the power to fulfill the wicked, horrible call that God had in store for him, and what he had to do was go to the Assyrians, and the people in Israel and say, "Listen. Be faithful. We are telling you that God does not want

you people in Israel to side with the Assyrians. They are going to fade away in a few short years.”

Well, everybody was sure that Isaiah was crazy. There was no way that army could be taken over by anybody. No one could approach them, but still Isaiah had to do it. He was lucky to flee with his life.

Then sure enough, God said, “Isaiah, I knew they would turn you down. That was part of the plan.” And, I can just hear Isaiah going, “Then why did you send me?”

“Because someone had to warn them, so that later, when they failed to listen, they would remember that it was them who turned Me down.”

So, sure enough, in a few short years the Assyrians faded, but not before the Assyrians went in - because Judah was unfaithful and didn't listen - and tore everything apart. But mysteriously, when they got to the temple, when they got to Jerusalem, for no reason that we could ever figure out in the breath of human history, when they got to the temple, the Assyrians stopped, turned around and went home.

The Assyrian army seemed to be more faithful and more fearful of God than God's own people. Shortly after that, the Assyrian's army just crumbled. The Assyrian's power of that entire empire fell away. Then the people were left to say, “We were wrong.”

The Assyrians gave them a choice to fight or pay tribute. To fight and believe that God would protect them, or pay tribute in essence. Not to pay tribute to God, but to pay tribute to the empire. They paid tribute to the empire, because they couldn't trust that what God was saying would come to pass.

Now, God has called each one of us to something specific, at some point in our life. If it hasn't happened, I bet it will. God is calling you to something that you can't believe you could do.

I didn't grow up in the greatest family environment and I didn't want to be a parent; but we thought we would try it, once. I was right. One of the hardest calls in my life was getting over my own fear - my own prejudices - I put on what I could and could not do. I got on my knees more than once - especially in high school - and God carried me through. Now, whether or not you are a parent - and if you are a parent you know what I'm saying, but even you are not - maybe you were or are a parent to your parents and you know what it's like to fall on your knees, and go, “How am I going to do this?”

Maybe you are struggling with your adult children, who are still learning to grow up and [saying], “How am I going to do this?” You know the confession well. You can blame yourself. Maybe God has called you to be that prophet in your workplace, and you can't figure out how they are going to get it right. It may be unjust and you are trying to figure out how to work with them - guide them through it - without getting fired yourself. There are any number of examples: Maybe it's your extended family, and you are trying to figure out how to bring them back together when relationships have been severed.

I don't know what your call is. But I do know that most of the time when God calls people, it's not to something easy. It's to something wickedly hard. There are a couple of things I want to say about that. One is that you need to "wear" your call - especially the difficult calls - as a badge of honor, because apparently God thought you could do it, when no one else could. You need to hear that. It isn't because you are great. Often it's the exact opposite. It's the fact you are the least likely person to do it. But, the reason God picks you or me for a specific task when we are so low and [we think] it's impossible for us to do it, then God will get the credit, because it certainly could not have been Scott [us]. Then everyone will say, "Look at what God did."

The second thing is that God will pick you when you are not worthy so that God can make you worthy. You're not now. You are still on your knees, going, "I'm not worthy." But just like Isaiah, when you have a call and it's tough, God will give you that Declaration of Pardon and say, "Get off your knees. I have blessed you; I have made you worthy, not because of what you have done, but what I have done to you."

Now I can stand up. Now you can stand up and face the adversity. But that isn't the only thing. Now, God through the Holy Spirit gives you the opportunity of prayer. When you pray, God answers and gives you more strength.

Now, as you read your Bible and you do a devotion every morning, all of a sudden the Holy Spirit is moving in you. You find the example of the first and second persons of the Trinity: the Divine parent and Jesus Christ. You find the example of the prophets and the apostles, and suddenly you see yourself in Moses and Abraham, in Sarah and Phoebe and you know they didn't have the power apart from the Holy Spirit. Maybe, just maybe, if God's Holy Spirit could do it for them, perhaps God will get me through my moment in this awfully difficult call God has given us.

One of the reasons we do a SUMMIT program is to care for the community, but another reason is for you all to learn what you are called to do in your life, and to take on challenges. Every one of you, when you asked what group you were going to, [knew] each one of them was going to be hard, otherwise they wouldn't need you: placements where children cannot read, you are picking children who have challenges, with physical ailments, any other issues. The place that you are called to go is going to be hard. and if you are doing your job well - and God's calling you to it - God is going to drive you to your knees in the next couple of months.

"How am I going to do it? How do I get through to them? What do you want from me?" These are the questions you might ask in prayer and in worship with confession and prayer in the Word. God will answer you and, in your unworthiness, God will make you worthy - whether it is for a SUMMIT program, a church committee, your family - whatever it is, God did it for Isaiah and God will do it for you.

Amen