

We are Saved to Serve!
Isaiah 6:1-8 May 27, 2018 Pastor Robert Hein

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If your life ended suddenly tonight, and you stood before the Lord for judgment, and he asked you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?” what would you tell him? Some people might hope to gain access into heaven based upon their performance. Remember what that Pharisee in the temple once boasted, **“God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”** Luke 18:11-12 He thought that his good works should earn him a ticket straight to heaven. Others might point to their merit badges, as evidence that they have done their duty to God, and are therefore worthy of eternal life. Still others might hold up an indulgence as proof that they have made temporal satisfaction for their sins. Some of us might even be tempted to hold up our offering statement or church attendance record or volunteer hours at church as proof that we are now most worthy of heaven; we’ve earned it.

When I was in Nepal recently, I was discussing Reincarnation with a Hindu tourist guide. I asked him if he hoped to come back to a better life in his next reincarnation. He said “yes”, and so I asked him why. “Do you think you are good enough to merit a better life next time around?” He said “Oh yes, I’m about 75% good.” In his mind that was good enough, good enough to earn the favor of the gods and good enough to be rewarded with a better life in his next existence. Hinduism is all about building karma – good for good and bad for bad. It’s all about you. Your actions in this life make you worthy of a better life or a worse life to come.

This is really the premise upon which all man made religions are based. They all focus on you and what you have to do to merit eternal life. Some say you have to do it all. Others say Jesus does his part, and then you have to do the rest, but in one way, shape or form, they are all merit based. You could call these the religions of **“DO!”**

These man made religions are very popular and very appealing to our human reasoning. They make us feel good because we feel we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

Yes, it feels good to think we can take the credit for what we achieve in this life and in the life to come. But while this self-righteous way of thinking may seem right to us, in the end, it leads to death. Yes, every man made religion is doomed to frustration and failure. They only lead you away from God into eternal destruction in hell.

Our devotion today from Isaiah chapter 6 makes this clear. Isaiah was granted a vision of the Lord God almighty, high and exalted, seated on a throne in his majestic temple. Above him were seraphim, that is, a special rank of angels, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. **And they were calling to one another:” Holy, holy holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke.”**

Certainly this was an awesome, glorious sight to behold! But awesome as it was, to Isaiah, it was actually very frightening, even dreadful and terrifying.

You see Isaiah recognized that he had no right to be there, no right to stand in the presence of such a holy and a righteous God. Isaiah cried out, **“Woe to me! 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.”**

Now Isaiah was actually a pretty good person whom I am sure lived a pretty good life. He even trusted in the Lord. But you don’t hear Isaiah boasting about his good works before the Lord and claiming that his performance made him worthy to stand in God’s presence. Instead Isaiah broke forth with a humble confession of his grievous sins and his complete unworthiness. He recognized that he didn’t even have the right to be there. You see, sinful people and a holy God just don’t mix. A sinful person like him could last as long in the presence of a holy righteous God as long as a piece of paper could last in the midst of a blazing furnace.

Now I know that God is love, and everyone loves to hear that. But there is another side to God that people tend to forget about, and that is his absolute holiness. “Holy holy, holy is the Lord God almighty!” – Three times holy, giving us a little hint of the Triune nature of our glorious God.

Holy means that God is perfect and righteous and completely set apart from sin and every form of evil. I am certainly glad to know that God is not like Adolph Hitler or the Taliban ISIS terrorists. But God's holiness presents a problem for sinners like you and me. In Psalm 5:4-5 King David wrote, **"You are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong."**

Now don't think David was just talking about really bad people out there like terrorists and drug dealers. He was also talking about you and me, and the grievous sins we commit, as well as our utter failure to do what God requires of us in his holy law.

And it does no good to try and compare ourselves with other people who we feel are much worse sinners than we are, as though that lets us off the hook. The only comparison that really counts is comparing our lives with the perfect standard God establishes for us in his holy law, and there we all receive a failing grade. The Bible teaches, **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is no one righteous, not even one." Romans 3:23, 10**

It is completely foolish therefore to think that we can stand before the Lord and expect him to accept us and welcome us into heaven based upon our performance. The only honest admission you and I can make before a holy and righteous God is the same one Isaiah made in our devotion, **"Woe to me! 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."**

We admitted pretty much the same thing in our liturgy today when we confessed, **"Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin. For faithless worrying and selfish pride, For sins of habit and sins of choice, For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do, You should cast me away from your presence forever."**

I know this isn't easy to hear. It rubs against the grain. But it is truth, and it is truth that it is important for us to grasp. You see, unless the law crushes our sinful pride and drives us to our knees in repentance, we see no need for the Gospel, and Jesus has no place in our hearts. Who needs a Savior if they think they are doing fine all on their

own? Who needs a doctor if they don't think they are sick? That's why we recognize and confess our sins in church each week. Confession is good for the soul and it makes us appreciate Jesus all the more.

Isaiah knew he was in trouble too. Isaiah knew he had no right to stand in the presence of a holy righteous God and live. But then, in the midst of his hopelessness and near despair, something remarkable happened. **One of the seraphs flew to him with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched Isaiah's mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Isaiah 6:6-7**

Isaiah could do nothing to earn his way back into God's good graces, so God himself bridged the gap. God revealed a way to cleanse Isaiah from his guilt and make him worthy to stand in his holy presence. When the coal from that altar touched Isaiah's lips, his guilt was taken away and his sin atoned for. This coal, taken from the altar, pictured the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life in obedience to God's law. Jesus was perfect in every way, and now God credits Jesus' perfection to our account. And Jesus offered his life as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. His altar was the cross of Calvary where he shed his blood to purify us from all sin. As a result, we are now redeemed, restored and forgiven. The Apostle Paul explains this Great Exchange this way – **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** 2 Corinthians 5:21

So not only does God wash away our sin and guilt in Christ, he now also credits Jesus' perfect righteousness to our account. Clothed in his robe of righteousness, we can now stand in the presence of God and not be ashamed or afraid. Covered with the righteousness of Jesus, we can enjoy a sure hope of heaven, and know we belong there, faultless to stand before his throne.

Remember that question I asked of you earlier, "If your life ended suddenly tonight, and you stood before the Lord for judgment, and he asked you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" what would you tell him? Do you know the right answer, the saving truth revealed to us in the Gospel?

“Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross of Christ I cling!” hymn #382 also puts this beautifully. Let’s read this verse all together from the screen, **“My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus’ blood and righteousness; I dare to make no other claim, But wholly lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.”** CW 382

Now this is an answer we can offer in complete confidence. This is a blessed certainty! This is the sure foundation we enjoy in Christ alone!

Isaiah understood this. He got the key point of this vision. Despairing of himself, he put his complete trust and confidence in the promised Savior and cherished the blessings his coming would bring to him. The apostle John confirmed this when he wrote, **“Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.”** John 12:41

And so this vision which started out being terrifying and dreadful to Isaiah changed to a very comforting vision which filled his heart with peace, and hope and joy.

When Isaiah realized his unworthiness and the punishment he deserved from God because of his sins, and then came to understand what amazing things God had done for him in Christ, he was simply overwhelmed. He stood in awe of such a gracious God who would show such tender mercy to a poor miserable sinner like him.

So much so that he we was now eager to answer his Lord’s call to service. Isaiah tells us , **“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

Isaiah just couldn’t keep this good news to himself. He felt compelled to share it with others. And so Isaiah began his ministry as the Lord’s prophet, speaking God’s Word to God’s people. Even though we hear Isaiah speaking already in the first 5 chapters of Isaiah, this vision in chapter 6 reveals his actual commissioning, his call into the public ministry.

Sometimes you see a famous athlete promoting a product on TV. The ad is much more convincing when the athlete actually uses the product himself and believes in it. That’s what makes Isaiah’s prophecies so compelling. He was speaking as a satisfied customer and a raving fan. He spoke from the heart and from firsthand experience.

He knew firsthand the punishment and the abandonment he deserved from God because of his sins, and he treasured the forgiveness and acceptance he received from in Christ instead. And he wanted everyone around him to enjoy the same priceless blessings he cherished so very much. Isaiah is often called the Evangelist of the Old Testament because his book is so full of Gospel pictures, previewing the gracious blessings Christ brings to our hearts and lives. Give yourself a spiritual treat this summer and commit yourself to reading through the entire book of Isaiah.

As you do so, you will grow in your appreciation of the tender mercy God has lavished upon you in your life, and you will want to praise God all the more for his goodness to you. Every day you will also look for ways to thank Jesus for his blessings, by displaying a servant heart and reflecting his love and blessings to the people around you.

Then worship will never be a burdensome obligation for you, but rather, a joyful privilege. Think of it. God does not cast you away. You are privileged every week to enter God's house as his dear children to worship him with joy, to sing his praises, to hear his Word and to receive his blessings. Celebrate that blessing every chance you get. And you and I poor unworthy sinners even get to approach the altar to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, to personally dine with the Lord of the universe and to receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. This is not a right. Rather, it is a gracious privilege, just the opposite of what we have earned or deserved.

And why do we enjoy this awesome privilege? Not because of our performance. Not because of our good life. No, only because Jesus Christ, the Son of God has taken that coal from the altar of sacrifice and touched our lips to wash away our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. Cherish this great blessings! Thank Jesus every day for his goodness, and then when he gives you opportunities to serve, in your family, in your church, and in your daily vocation, answer gladly, just like Isaiah did, "Here am I! Send me, send me!" Amen.