

A TRANSFORMATIONAL ENCOUNTER (Isaiah 6:1-9)

I have heard it said that before the marriage, as she thinks about her husband-to-be, the bride-to-be says to herself, “I will change him.” Meanwhile, as he thinks his soon-to-be wife, the groom consoles himself with the thought, “Ah, she will never change.” Both are terribly mistaken.

In the discipline of psychology, it has long been debated whether people can really, truly change. Think about that for a moment. If you have a reserved personality, you may become less shy, but you are never going to be the life of the party nor would you want to be. On the other hand, if you are a loud, gregarious, never-met-a-stranger kind of person, you will never become a retiring wall flower, but you can learn to tone it down as the need arises.

Can people fundamentally change? The prophet Jeremiah asked rhetorically, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?” The NLT finishes out that verse with the words, “Neither can you start doing good, for you always do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23).

The human track record isn’t very good in regard to people changing themselves. God, however, is up to the task of changing you. The Bible is replete with promises and examples of Him doing just that. When Jesus called His first disciples, He assured them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). When you begin following Jesus, He can take you from who and what you presently are and mold you into who and what He wants you to be.

I think about the Apostle John. He and his brother were nicknamed by Jesus, “the sons of thunder.” They had quick tempers. They were the ones who wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven to incinerate His enemies. Yet, that same John has come to be known through the centuries as the apostle of love.

Paul, the strict Jew, did everything he could to stamp out the growing Christian faith. He went around arresting Christians, but one day on the road to Damascus, Jesus stopped him and turned him around. Soon, that same Paul went everywhere preaching the Christian faith and starting Christian churches.

Paul, who himself experienced personal and complete transformation went on to write, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (1 Corinthians 5:17).

I am convinced that true transformation is possible and only possible through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. In fact, when you have a personal encounter with the Lord, you can’t help but be transformed.

Last Sunday we began studying the Book of Isaiah. We looked, principally, at three verses—Isaiah 1:18-20. In those verses, God issues what I called a gospel call. This good news is not announced to good people, not godly people, not to those who are attempting to obey God. This gospel call goes out to rebellious people, to those who have who have walked away from God and who are living in deliberate defiance to His will and His law. This call carries with it an invitation to come to Him, and if these rebels will hear and heed His call, they will experience full forgiveness. That is what makes this gospel call such good news.

We noted that Isaiah has been called the fifth gospel, and over the next several months, we are going to look at the gospel according to Isaiah. Today, our text focuses on what I and many others consider to be the call of Isaiah from God to be a prophet. Isaiah had a personal encounter with his Lord. That encounter transformed his life. It was a life-changing.

One aspect of the gospel is that when you have a personal encounter with God through Christ, your life is forever changed. It is changed both for time and eternity.

Turn with me to Isaiah 6. As far as I can tell, the events of this passage precede the messages of chapters 1-5. Isaiah is not the only writing prophet to place his call somewhere other than the beginning of his book. The call of Amos is found in the 7th chapter of his 9-chapter book. Placing his call where he does, Isaiah 6 serves as a fitting conclusion to the first five chapters and a good introduction to chapters 7-12.

Let's read our text—Isaiah 6:1-9a.

I have entitled today's message, "A Transformational Encounter." You may never be called to do what Isaiah did, but there are three things that were true of his transformation that will be true of yours if you have an authentic encounter with the one who died and rose on your behalf.

The Prelude to a Transformational Encounter Is Seeing the Glory of the Lord

In v. 1, Isaiah tells us when this event occurred and what he saw. We are not told if King Uzziah died before or after Isaiah saw what he saw, but his death happened in the same year. I believe Isaiah's experience happened prior to Uzziah's death because in 1:1, Isaiah includes Uzziah in the list of the kings during whose respective reigns he ministered.

The story of Uzziah is found in 2 Chronicles 26. Uzziah was 16 when he became king, and he reigned upon the throne for 52 years. Uzziah was a godly man, and God prospered him. Accordingly, Judah experienced peace and prosperity under Uzziah. Long into his reign, Uzziah became proud. One day he decided to go into the temple and burn incense to the LORD. That was not his job. The high priest and a contingent of 80 courageous priests went to confront the king. They told him that he had overstepped his authority, that he had crossed a line. Had Uzziah backed down and said, "You know, you're right. My bad," I think the whole affair would have been forgotten, and he would have been just fine. That is not what he did. The text tells us that in his pride, Uzziah got angry with the priests. God didn't let that slide. Immediately, leprosy appeared on the forehead of the disobedient king. The priests ushered him out of the temple. For the rest of his life, Uzziah lived in seclusion, away from his palace and away from the temple. He died alone. He died a leper.

I imagine that as a youth, Isaiah idolized Uzziah. Our heroes, however, have feet of clay. When they stumble and fall, it can be difficult for us. We need to learn to get our eyes off people and look to the Lord. That is what Isaiah did, and Isaiah's life was transformed.

We could spend a great deal of time debating whether Isaiah had a vision or whether he was physically present when the events described occurred. We could debate whether

he was in the actual temple in Jerusalem or whether he was transported to the heavenly realms where God sits enthroned. In the final analysis, it matters not exactly where he was and whether it was vision. What matters is what Isaiah saw, what he heard, and what he experienced.

Isaiah reports that he saw the Lord. The Hebrew word which is translated here as *Lord* is not a personal name. It is a title. The NIV often translates that word as *Sovereign*. The title is also a possessive noun. That means it could be, maybe should be translated as “my Lord.” Isaiah is saying, “I saw my Lord high and exalted,” not King Uzziah. He and Uzziah served the same Lord. It was that Lord whom Isaiah saw

Look at the glorious fashion in which Isaiah saw his Lord. He was seated on a throne, high and lifted up. Matthew Henry wrote that our God “sits upon a throne of glory, before which we must worship, a throne of government, under which we must be subject, and a throne of grace, to which we may come boldly. This throne is high, and lifted up above all competition and contradiction.”

In addition to seeing the glory of the Lord, Isaiah sees and hears God being worshiped by seraphim. Here in Isaiah 6:2, 6 are the only times the Bible mentions them. They are angelic beings. They had three sets of wings for a total of six wings. Their name means *flaming ones, fiery ones*. Their brightness, however, was no match for God’s glory and brilliance. As they worshiped God, they covered their faces with one set of wings. God was too bright for them to look upon.

Likewise, Isaiah’s view of God was obscured. According to v. 4, the house was filled with smoke.

In v. 3, the seraphim are pictured as singing antiphonally as they worshiped. One set of seraphim would sing, “Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts,” and a second set on the opposite side of the Lord’s throne would answer, “the whole earth is full of His glory.”

Taking in this scene did something to Isaiah. Look at v. 5. As he saw God as He truly is, Isaiah began to see himself for who he was. In the light of God’s glory, he saw the darkness of his own heart. He saw his own sinfulness.

Eight times between chapters 3-5, Isaiah pronounces *woe* upon those who are acting wickedly. After chapter 6 and through chapter 45, Isaiah declares *woe* at least five times to others who have fallen short of God’s commands. Remember that in terms of time, chapter 6 came before all the other chapters in this book. That means before Isaiah spoke *woe* over anybody else, he said *woe* about himself. Before he judged anybody else, he judged himself. He saw the condition of his own heart. He saw the chasm that existed between what God expects and who he was.

I believe the great need of people in our day, and I mean people both outside and inside the church, is for them and us to see our own sinfulness. We have a much higher view of ourselves than is warranted. We tell people that God can forgive their sin, but that is not a category that means anything to them. As far as many are concerned, they are swell people, and God wouldn’t have any problem accepting them. They see no need of God because they are doing just fine on their own, thank you very much.

There are even those within the church who think they are doing God a favor when they show up at a worship service. They realize they sin from time to time, but who doesn’t, they think to themselves. They, too, are blind to their sinfulness and their need of God’s mercy.

That changes when people get a proper view of God. That is why I say the prelude to transformation is seeing the glory of the Lord.

This was the experience of Job. You remember that God allowed all sorts of calamities to befall Job. His friends come to him and charge him with wrong-doing. According to their theology, if a person suffers it is because there is unconfessed sin in their life. They want Job to come clean and admit his sin. Job maintains that he is righteous, and his self-appraisal is in keeping with what is said about him in Job 1:1 one, that Job “was blameless and upright.”

Beginning in chapter 38, however, and running through chapter 41, God shows up. He puts Job on the witness stand, and He asks Job question after question.

When God finishes his cross-examination of Job, we hear the voice of Job again in chapter 42. Job says to God, “I heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You; therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).

We desperately need a fresh vision of God. My prayer is that God would show Himself to us anew. It is when we see Him for who He is that we see ourselves for who we are.

If you want to see God, read this Book.

The Power of a Transformational Encounter Is Found in the Cleansing Touch of God

Look at what happens on the heels of Isaiah seeing his own sinfulness (6:6-7). The altar was where the sacrifice was completed. It was the place where the bull or goat or lamb was slain. All those sacrifices point toward the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus who shed His blood once for all time. No other sacrifice is needed.

One of those shining ones, one of those burning ones took a burning coal from the altar with tongs and placed that red hot coal to Isaiah’s mouth. That is one reason I view this event as a vision. Otherwise, Isaiah would have bore a scar from a burn mark the rest of his life. The angel assured Isaiah that his sin had been atoned for and thus the guilt of his sin had been forever removed. It is not the live coal that took away his sin. It is what the coal represents. It was taken from the place of sacrifice. When the sacrifice of Jesus is applied to our lives, our sin is removed from us as far as the east is from the west.

Our lives are transformed from the moment that we are justified. As soon as God touches our hearts with His grace, we are changed. We become objects of His grace.

In the conclusion to his book, *In the Grip of Grace*, Max Lucado tells the story of a young man he was seated next to on plane. Let me read you the story the way Lucado wrote it:

“Good, I’m glad you’re sitting next to me. Sometimes I throw up.”

Not exactly what you like to hear from the airline passenger in the next seat. Before I had time to store my bag in the overhead compartment, I knew his name, age, and itinerary. “I’m Billy Jack. I’m 14, and I’m going home to see my daddy.” I started to tell him my name, but he spoke first.

“I need someone to look after me. I get confused a lot.”

He told me about the special school he attended and the medication he took. “Can you remind me to take my pill in a few minutes?” Before we buckled up, he stopped the airline attendant. “Don’t forget about me,” he told her. “I get confused.”

Once we were airborne, Billy Jack ordered a soft drink and dipped his pretzels in it. He kept glaring at me as I drank and asked if he could drink what I didn’t. He spilled some of his soda and apologized.

“No problem,” I said, wiping it up.

Billy Jack showed me his cassette player and asked if I’d like to listen to one of his tapes. “I brought my favorites,” he smiled, handing me the sound tracks from *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, and *The Lion King*.

When he started playing with his Nintendo Game Boy, I tried to doze off. That’s when he started making noises with his mouth, imitating a trumpet. “I can sound like the ocean, too,” he bragged, swishing spit back and forth in his cheeks.

(Didn’t sound like the ocean, but I didn’t tell him.)

Billy Jack was a little boy in a big body. “Can clouds hit the ground?” he asked me. I started to answer, but he looked back out the window like he’d never asked. Unashamed of his needs, he didn’t let a flight attendant pass without a reminder: “Don’t forget to look after me.”

When they brought the food: “Don’t forget to look after me.”

When they brought more drinks: “Don’t forget to look after me.”

When any attendant would pass, Billy Jack would urge: “Don’t forget to look after me.”

I honestly can’t think of one time Billy Jack didn’t remind the crew he needed their attention. The rest of us didn’t. We never asked for help. We were grownups. Sophisticated. Self-reliant. Seasoned travelers. Most of us didn’t even listen to the emergency landing instructions. (Billy Jack asked me to explain them to him.)

Billy Jack spent the final hour of the flight with his head on my shoulder, his hands folded between his knees. Just when I thought he was asleep, his head popped up and he said, “My dad is going to meet me at the airport. I can’t wait to see him because he watches after me.”

You and I serve a God, a Heavenly Father, who watches after us. We are on our way to see Him, and I can hardly wait, but even before we get there, He still looks after us. We are the recipients of His transforming grace.

Let’s consider one final truth.

The Proof of a Transformational Encounter Is Shown by Serving the Will of God

After being cleansed, Isaiah heard the Lord speak. By the way, the Hebrew title for Lord is *Adonai*. It is plural. The singular, *Adon* refers to a human sovereign, a human king or ruler, but *Adonai* is plural. It refers to God. So, *Adonai* is both plural and possessive. Isaiah is saying, “I heard my Lords speaking.” The text implies that God was

not speaking to Isaiah, but rather, Isaiah overheard the divine counsel talking amongst themselves. God asks, “Who will go for us?”

God has a message He wants to get out to His needy creation. He wonders aloud whom He will send. Isaiah hears that question, and something stirs within his heart.

Do you remember being in school. The teacher would ask questions aloud to the class. Invariably, there was that one student who always knew the answer. He or she would raise their arm and wave it in the air. The student wanted to make sure that the teacher noticed and would call on him or her. In effect, they student was saying, “I know. I know the answer. Pick me. Pick me.”

Essentially, that is what Isaiah was doing. He heard God voice a need. He needed a messenger to go on His behalf. Isaiah was volunteering. “I’ll go. I’ll go. Pick me. Pick me.”

According to the New Testament, God no longer waits for volunteers. Jesus, our Adonai, gave us a commission—The Great Commission. He told us to go into all the world and make disciples. He expects us to go for Him, to bear His message to a world that desperately needs to hear.

We don’t have to ask Him to send us. He already has. But we do need to say, “I’ll go. I’ll go.” What will it take for you to say, “I’ll go”?

First, you must see Him. See Him in His glory. Let Him be high and lifted up in your own life.

Second, experience His gracious and cleansing touch. Let Him deal with your sin; let Him remove it.

Once you see Him and are touched by Him, that is when you will hear Him. Once you hear Him, say, “Yes. I’ll go.”

The proof that you have been transformed by an encounter with God is that you will hear Him say “go” and you will go.

Everyday we have encounters with people. We experience encounters with family members, co-workers, students, teachers, neighbors, wait staff, cashiers, and the list goes on. Some encounters are humorous, frustrating, enlightening, tense, peaceful, instructive, and the list goes on.

Rarely are those encounters transformational. Ask God to give you an encounter with Him that will change you from the inside out. That is a prayer He will gladly answer.