

**“Touching Heaven:
A PRAYER OF VOCATION”**

**Isaiah 6:1-8
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16**

God has a plan for your life!

A sermon preached by
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It's good to be back from vacation. We had a wonderful time, and as good as it is to go, it's always good to get back home. The first week, we sat on the beach and watched the ocean and relaxed. The second week, we set foot in 11 states in seven days. The first week was a vacation; the second week was a trip.

One of the most amazing trips I ever took was to the Holy Land. To see the land of the Bible opens up the Scripture in a new way, and to see the sites where some of the Biblical events happened, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, was awe-inspiring.

One of the highlights of the trip was our visit to the Temple Mount, where the Temple of Herod had stood and where Solomon's Temple had stood before that. The Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D., and it has never been rebuilt. But the foundation remains. The stones are as big as semi trailers, laid with perfect precision. Along the Western Wall of the Temple ruins, Jews and other people of faith still come to pray. They believe God still inhabits the Wall as God once did in the Temple. It is a holy place.

I stood there looking at the Jews, men on one side and women on the other side of a fence, reciting their prayers in Hebrew. In the cracks of the wall are little pieces of paper containing the prayers of the people. I placed my hands against the Wall and put my forehead against it, and I prayed, as millions of people have done for centuries. I could feel the holiness of that place. I could imagine a little of how Isaiah must have felt.

Multiply that experience by a thousand, and you might understand what Isaiah experienced in the Temple the day he received his call. I had a spiritual experience; Isaiah heard the song of the angels and saw God on his throne! It's not clear from the text if this vision of God in the Temple was something that happened to Isaiah in a moment of personal prayer, or if it was in the middle of a worship service. But it is clear that it was a spiritual experience that changed his life forever. It was a turn-around day in his life. It was the moment he heard the call from God to be a prophet. It was his experience of vocation.

From this moment on, Isaiah knew what God had in mind for him to do. God had a plan for Isaiah's life.

When we talk about a call, we often think of Biblical figures or preachers. Abraham, Moses, the prophets, Paul—they were all called by God. I was called to preach. But what we often forget is that everyone has a call. Paul starts off the Letter to the Romans asserting that he was called to be an apostle, but then he reminds his readers that they were “*called to belong to Jesus Christ*” and “*called to be saints.*”¹ In our New Testament reading this morning, Paul begs them “*to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*”²

Every person has a purpose. Every life has a call. The word “vocation” comes from the Latin word *vocare*—to call. You have been called and given gifts for some Kingdom purpose. God has a plan for your life. When you realize your call and discover what it is, then your life will really take off. You will find energy, strength, vitality, joy, meaning, fulfillment—all the things that come from living in the will of God. Sometimes it just involves realizing that what you are doing or love to do with your life is your call from God. It's the way you are wired, the way your life was intended to be.

Let's look at this vision of Isaiah the prophet. I think he shows us three things that need to happen if you are going to realize the call God has placed on your life.

First, you need **inspiration**. You need an experience of being filled from another Source, a moment when you realize that you are part of something that is so much bigger than your own self and your own desires. You need to be inspired.

Isaiah had the inspiring experience of a lifetime when he saw the Lord. God was sitting on a throne, and the hem of his robe filled the entire Temple. The Lord was surrounded by angels, great flying spiritual beings with three pairs of wings. They called to one another, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*”³ The power of the angels' voices shook the Temple from top to bottom, and the house filled with smoke. Can you even imagine such an awesome experience?

We need to have some kind extraordinary spiritual experience to lift us up to a spiritual plane above the boring routine of daily life. We need to know we are part of the work of an awesome God in the world. It may not be the same kind of dramatic vision Isaiah had; that's OK. It could be very simple—no shaking, no smoke, no angels flapping their wings—but very real nonetheless. We still need the inspiration.

Steve Sjogren is the founding pastor of a Vineyard church in Cincinnati, Ohio. One day he was feeling particularly discouraged, and he announced to his wife Janie that he was quitting the ministry. She had heard this kind of talk before, so she suggested that Steve go for a drive and think things through. That usually seemed to help. "And while you're out," she said, "would you pick me up a burrito?"

Steve drove around for about an hour, complaining to the Lord the whole time. Finally he drove through the burrito place to pick up Janie's food. As he waited in the line, he felt the Lord speaking to him—not an audible voice, and not through the drive-through speaker, but an inner compulsion to do a very simple thing. He felt God was telling him to open the door of the car and receive a special gift. It seemed kind of silly, but Steve did it, and right there under his car door in the drive-through lane was an old, tarnished penny embedded in the asphalt. Listen to what he wrote about that experience:

"I reached down to pry out the coin and held it in my hand feeling less than thankful for this 'gift.' The Lord spoke to me again and said, 'Many people in this city feel about as valuable as discarded pennies. I've given you the gift of gathering people who seem valueless. Though these are the people the world casts off, they have great value to me. If you will open your heart, I will bring you more pennies than you know what to do with.'"⁴

From that penny's worth of inspiration, Steve and the Lord built a huge ministry to lost and forgotten people in the city of Cincinnati.

What is your inspiration today? Have you ever had a glimpse of the might and power and glory of God? What is it that motivates you to undertake this Christian journey?

The second part of realizing God's plan for your life is **confession**. We have to understand that God is in charge here; God is in control; and our lives belong to him. We are not self-sufficient. This ministry is not the pastors' thing. It's not a Fort Smith thing. It's not a Methodist thing. It's a God thing. Without God, we fall flat. We are incomplete without God.

As we read through the Biblical list of great servants of God, we discover that none of them were perfect people. Every single one of them had problems, deficiencies, and handicaps that could have held them back from serving God. But they didn't hold back. In every case, God overcame the person's difficulties and gave him or her the power to serve.

Isaiah realized his inadequacy when he stood in the presence of God's awesome holiness. "*Woe is me!*" he said. "*I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*"⁵ Almost immediately upon his confession, one of the angels cleansed Isaiah's lips with a burning hot coal taken from the fire of the altar of God. As painful as that sounds, it was effective: "*Your guilt has departed, and your sin is blotted out.*"⁶ The young prophet found out that where he was lacking in anything—like holiness—he could depend on God.

Pastor Rod Cooper compares this experience to standing in front of a mirror:

What's the natural response when you've seen God? You're convicted of sin. "Woe is me, for I am undone." The closer I walk with God, the more quickly I feel my sin and realize how much I need God.

It's like a huge mirror with a great big light over it. When we stand away from the mirror, things look pretty good: suit looks in order; tie looks straight; the hair, what's left of it, is combed.

But as you begin to move towards the mirror, things begin to show up. The suit has a spot on it. The tie is a little bit wrinkled. The hair is out of place. The closer we get to the bright light, the more we realize our defects. It's the same way when we get close to

God. When we get close to him, we realize how much we need him and how far we are from him. We're convicted of our sin.⁷

The closer we get to God, the more we can see the blemishes and imperfections in our lives. But the Good News is, where we are inadequate, God is sufficient. Where we are incomplete, God is complete. When we are awful, God is awesome. When we are weak, God is strong. When we have made a mess of things, God will heal and cleanse. When we are standing on the point of despair, God gives us hope to carry on.

If you want to find out what God's plan is for your life, experience your inspiration, make your confession, and thirdly, answer your **commission**. Respond to your calling. If you are walking with God, open to his Spirit, dependent on him, God will guide your life, and you will feel a nudge, an urge, sometimes a shove to serve God in some way. That is your calling. Answer your commission.

When Isaiah had experienced this vision in the Temple, and he had cried out in confession and been cleansed, then he heard the voice of God saying, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" Isaiah answered, "*Here am I. Send me!*"⁸ He didn't know where God was sending him. At that point God had not provided a ministry description. Isaiah had no clue about what he was getting into. He just had to respond. He just had to follow the call.

Karen Watson was a young Baptist missionary who responded to the call to go to the Middle East. Before she left in 2003, she wrote a letter and left it with her pastors. It was only to be opened in the event of her death. Tragically, Karen Watson, along with four other Christian missionaries, were killed in Iraq on March 15, 2004, martyred for their faith. The letter was opened and read at her funeral. In part it said:

When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn't called to a place. I was called to him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, his glory my reward.

One of the most important things to remember right now is to preserve the work. ...Keep sending missionaries out. Keep raising up fine young pastors.

In regards to any service, keep it small and simple. Yes, simply, just preach the gospel. ...Be bold and preach the life-saving, life-changing, forever-eternal gospel. Give glory and honor to our Father.

The Missionary Heart:

Care more than some think is wise.

Risk more than some think is safe.

Dream more than some think is practical.

Expect more than some think is possible.

I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience. ...There is no joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving him.⁹

How far will you follow God? You don't have to go to Iraq to be in mission for God. You can be a missionary in Fort Smith, Arkansas, with our downtown neighbors, in your work, in your school, in your home. You can live out your calling from God in this church and in this community, if that's what God is calling you to do. Will you offer yourself totally to the opportunities God gives you to follow him? Or will your response be diminished by your concern about the cost—it's not convenient; it takes too much time; it's expensive; it drains me emotionally; it's not something I've ever done before. What will your response be when you hear the call of God?

Make no mistake. God has called; God is calling; God will call you to make a difference. God has a wonderful plan for your life, and until you find it and do it, you will not be complete.

Today, I hope you'll pray as Isaiah did. Pray for the inspiration of the Spirit. Pray confessing your sinful heart and your dependence on God. Pray to answer the call and be sent to do God's will. Pray like that, and I believe you will discover God's plan for your life. You will find his power at work in you. You will know his perfect will. You will touch heaven.

Let's close with a prayer of vocation today prayed by Sir Francis Drake. Drake was a British ship captain, explorer, and sometimes pirate in the 16th century. He is not altogether a good role model for discipleship, but many of the called are not. However, his prayer speaks to the inspiration and challenge of our calling:

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new Earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.¹⁰ Amen.

¹ Romans 1:6-7.

² Ephesians 4:1.

³ Isaiah 6:3.

⁴ Steve Sjogren, from the files of *Leadership*. PreachingToday.com.

⁵ Isaiah 6:5.

⁶ Isaiah 6:6.

⁷ Rod Cooper, "Beholding the King," Preaching Today, Tape No. 150.

⁸ Isaiah 6:8.

⁹ "Keep Sending Missionaries," *Baptist Press*, March 24, 2004.

¹⁰ Sir Francis Drake, *PreachingToday.com*.