

CALL OF ISAIAH

Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah's call to be a prophet came in a mighty vision of God. He was in the temple at Jerusalem after the death of King Uzziah, 742BC, when he saw the seraphim standing guard beside God and was transfixed by their words 'Holy, holy, holy', repeated three times to express the superlative holiness of God. God is completely incomparable. No one and nothing is equal to him. Experiencing the holiness of God, Isaiah realizes that he does not live up to God's holiness (verse 5). He recognizes that he does not honour God with his speech and that he shares in the guilt of his society which does not honour God with its speech. He does not excuse himself by pleading that he is just a product of his society. Instead, he recognizes his responsibility both for his own sins and those of his culture. His guilt and sin disqualify him from God's service. But the seraphim touch his lips with a burning coal taken from the altar and assure him that his sins are forgiven and his guilt is taken away. In verse 8, Isaiah overhears God's deliberations with his council of angels. Who will be God's servant? Isaiah volunteers with the words, 'Here I am, send me.'

As Christians, we are called to be God's servants. We ought to recognize God's holiness and our sinfulness. Before we can serve him properly, we need to accept his forgiveness which was shown in Christ. Then, like Isaiah, we are able to volunteer to serve God. He is our holy God and Master and we are his forgiven servants. We may not be prophets, but we are part of his church, called to work together to make his message known to the world.

IMMANUEL

Isaiah 7:10-17

Judah was enduring an invasion by Syria and Israel (the ten tribes of the northern kingdom). During this time several conversations took place between Isaiah and King Ahaz. Isaiah wanted to assure the king that he had nothing to fear. If Ahaz trusted in God, God would rescue Judah. Verses 10 to 17 record one of these conversations. Isaiah, speaking in God's name, tells Ahaz to ask for a sign to assure him that God will deliver Judah. Ahaz declines God's offer; he does not want to put God to the test. God's response shows that this was not the king's real motive. Ahaz did not request a sign from God because he did not want to obey God. Isaiah proclaims that God himself will give Ahaz a sign. A woman has conceived and will bear a son named Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.' This would have been a sign of assurance since the presence of God gave assurance of victory. Isaiah adds that before the child is old enough to make intelligent choices, the land of Israel and Syria will be deserted. However, since Ahaz refused to trust in God, according to verse 17, Judah would be delivered from Israel, only to be conquered by Assyria. God took Ahaz's response with utmost seriousness. The New Testament identifies Jesus as Immanuel (see Matthew 1:23). In Jesus, God is with us. The presence of God can assure us of salvation or judgment, depending on our response to him. God holds out these two distinct futures, and our response will determine which future comes to pass. Like Ahaz, we have the choice. If we want salvation, which only God can bring, we must trust him and be willing to obey him. If we choose to rely on ourselves rather than on God, we are choosing to face God's judgment.

THE GREAT KING

Isaiah 9:2-7

This famous prophecy was given at a coronation—either Hezekiah's or Josiah's. On such occasions, prophets would honour the kings in exalted language, using the metaphor of father and son to refer to the relationship between God and the king. Coronations were times of great optimism. The nation recognized the wonderful future that was waiting if the king responded rightly to God.

In verses 2 and 3, Isaiah draws a contrast between the darkness of despair which had been experienced under the previous king and the joyous salvadon which could be ushered in by this new king. The joy of the coming salvation will be like the joy of harvest and the joy of the spoils of war. In verse 4, Isaiah expresses the hope that the king will free Israel from foreign oppression, even as Gideon freed it from the Midianites. In verse 5, the instruments of war will be destroyed since peace has made them obsolete.

Then Isaiah follows the common practice of comparing the king to God's son. Just as the Egyptians gave throne names to Pharaoh, Isaiah proclaims the names of the king:

- **Wonderful Counsellor** refers to the king's great wisdom.
- **Mighty God** is better translated 'Divine Warrior' and refers to the king's supernatural skill and strength in batde.
- **Everlasting Father**, or better, 'Father for ever', reflects the hope that the king will look after his people even as a father looks after his children.
- **Prince of Peace** indicates that the king will bring peace, prosperity and well-being to his people.

No Israelite king ever fulfilled this wonderful promise, but Jesus fulfilled it perfectly. And so Christians have identified this great king with Jesus. He is the 'great king', and we should join him in making his kingdom known.