

“What Has Been Your Most Intimate Encounter with God?”

Isaiah 6:1-8

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Have you ever shared your most intimate encounter with God? If you have, I would be willing to say that you chose your audience carefully. This kind of testimony is usually packed with emotions and difficult to put into words. I commend you if you have done so and trust that it helped you and inspired those that heard it.

I am grateful to Isaiah for sharing what I assume was his most intimate encounter with God. It has certainly inspired me.

Before I share Isaiah's vision and encounter, let me say three things about it. It is obvious by reading the text that Isaiah's experience was personal, enlightening and powerful.

First and foremost, it was personal. It was between God and him. We cannot mimic it and don't need to do so. This was Isaiah's vision. Don't even try to reproduce it or feel guilty if you can't. That is not its purpose.

Secondly, it was enlightening. It taught him what he needed to know at that point in his life about God, life and himself. It can provide some good lessons for us, too.

Thirdly, it was powerful. It catapulted him to a deeper level of commitment and service than he had ever known. This priest became a prophet whose voice still speaks through the written word. Perhaps it can motivate us to be of greater service to our Lord, too.

Having said this, I want to share with you Isaiah's unique encounter with God. Follow along as I read the text and make comments about it.

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple” Isaiah 6:1.

I think Isaiah saw two things that day, an empty earthly throne and an occupied heavenly throne. Judah's throne was vacant. The beloved King Uzziah, in whom the people had placed confidence and trust for forty years, died. As a result, the people were afraid and anxious about the future and understandably so.

Do you recall where you were and how you felt when you heard that FDR, JFK or MLK, Jr. had died or been assassinated? Your feelings were probably very similar to the Jews upon learning of the death of Uzziah. He was a revered leader that brought peace and prosperity to their land. Living without him would be difficult and painful.

Isaiah knew this and probably felt the same as all the other mourners. After all, Uzziah was the only king of Israel he knew. However, it was during this time of mourning that Isaiah saw another throne, a heavenly one. Sitting on this throne was the eternal God of the universe. How reassuring this must have been for Isaiah. He realized that people come and go, even leaders, but God remains with His people, ready to comfort, lead, challenge and empower them.

It is a bit ironic, but the death or loss of someone significant in our lives can give birth to a vision of what we have left. And for the believer, there is never a time when everything has been lost.

“Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet and with two they were flying. They were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.’ At the sound of their voices the door posts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke” Isaiah 6:2-4.

In Isaiah's vision, God was not alone but surrounded by angelic beings that announced His distinctiveness, goodness, majesty and power. There was no place on earth that was off limits to God. All of it was His and He inhabited it all. This included the temple where Isaiah was. God was there, in his very presence. This audience of one was as important to God as the entire heavenly host!

Have you ever been alone in God's presence? Were you frightened, intimidated or comforted? I suppose it depended upon the circumstances. Let's look at Isaiah's reaction.

“ Woe to me! I cried. 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.’ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for’ ” Isaiah 6:5-7.

This was an amazing confession for several reasons. Isaiah was a part of the aristocracy of Judah. He did not lack for self-esteem or confidence. To acknowledge a sense of unworthiness in anyone's presence was unprecedented.

Prior to Isaiah's confession, a person in God's presence was aware of his or her mortality and dependence upon God, but not sinfulness. Isaiah, on the other hand, was keenly aware of his unholiness. He knew that he was not as good as the God that made and visited him. He saw the inconsistency between his words and actions, and not only his, but all those around him. He felt separated from God, cut off from the One that he needed most in his life during his time of grief and uncertainty.

What was God's immediate reaction to Isaiah's confession? It was to grant forgiveness, take away the sin and remove the guilt! Notice that no animal had to be sacrificed for this cleansing to occur. The only prerequisite was a humble spirit, honest confession and genuine repentance. Surely you sense the love of God for His children, including us.

What was Isaiah's response to God's act of mercy? *“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.

What a change in Isaiah's attitude. Earlier he felt separated from God and doomed to die but now he felt separated from his sin and ready to live. What a difference forgiveness can make! What a gift from God!

And isn't it amazing what forgiven people can hear, see and do? After his confession and God's forgiveness, Isaiah heard God's challenge for a spokesman to share this good news with others. He saw their overwhelming need for forgiveness, too, and he offered God his future, even though he was unaware of where God wanted him to go. Details of the mission were not a prerequisite for Isaiah's response. God had graciously taken care of his past. He could have his future, all of it.

Think you will ever have an encounter with God like Isaiah's? Maybe you already have. Perhaps you never will. That's ok. Remember what I said earlier. We cannot reproduce Isaiah's vision nor do we need to do so. We can, however, use it to understand more about God, life and ourselves. I hope you have done this today and are ready to respond in your own way to God's call upon your life.