



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
LEWISVILLE

Session 6

Called to Serve

Summary and Goal

After King Uzziah died, Isaiah encountered God in a vision, which made him aware of God's glory and his own sinfulness. God graciously provided cleansing and extended to Isaiah a call to serve. Isaiah accepted God's invitation even though he faced a difficult task. Like Isaiah, we fulfill our purpose and honor God when we serve Him.

Main Passages

Isaiah 6

Session Outline

1. A Vision of Glory (Isa. 6:1-4)
2. Woe is Me, Great is God (Isa. 6:5-7)
3. Ready and Willing (Isa. 6:8-13)

Theological Theme

In a vision, Isaiah saw the throne room in heaven and a glimpse of God's glory. God used that vision to call Isaiah to serve Him.

Christ Connection

Jesus' blood on the cross provides the ultimate atonement for sin and guilt for all who surrender their lives to Him in faith.

Missional Application

When we better understand God's glory and appropriately respond in surrender to Him in service, our lives shine for Him in the world.

Historical Context of Isaiah

Purpose

Isaiah's message is relatively simple. First, Isaiah accused God's people of sin: rebelling against the one who made them and redeemed them. Second, Isaiah instructed these sinners to reform their ways and act obediently. Third, Isaiah announced God's judgment on the people because of their sin. Finally, God revealed his future restoration of the people, or at least of the faithful remnant that survived the judgment. As part of the restoration of God's people, Isaiah foresaw both judgment on the nations (chaps. 13–23) and a future turning of the nations to God (2:1–4). The first part of the book (chaps. 1–39) emphasizes sin, the call to repentance, and judgment; the second part (chaps. 40–66) emphasizes the hope of restoration.

Author

The book presents itself as the writing of one man, Isaiah son of Amoz. The superscription to the book dates his prophetic activity as spanning the reigns of four kings of Judah: Uzziah (783–742 BC, Isaiah's call is dated to this king's last year, 6:1); Jotham (742–735 BC); Ahaz (735–716 BC); and Hezekiah (716–686 BC). On Uzziah (Azariah) see 2Kg 15:1–7; 2Ch 26:1–23. On Jotham see Kg 15:32–38; 2Ch 27:1–9. On Ahaz see 2Kg 16:1–20; 2Ch 28:1–27. On Hezekiah see 2Kg 18:1–20:21; 2Ch 29:1–32:33. Not much is known about Isaiah apart from his prophecy.

Setting

Uzziah's reign was a particularly prosperous time in the history of Judah, but storm clouds were on the horizon. Assyria was on the rise again in the person of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC). The Assyrian king threatened to engulf Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel. After the death of Tiglath-pileser, his successors, Shalmaneser and Sargon, defeated the northern kingdom in 722 BC and deported its citizens. This event brought Judah even more under the shadow of that great empire. Isaiah 37:38 suggests that the prophet lived until the death of Sennacherib in 681 BC.

Special Features

Isaiah was an eighth-century BC prophet. His book is the first of the Prophets in the English canon and the first of the Latter Prophets in the Hebrew canon. Isaiah is powerful in its poetic imagination, intriguing in its prophetic vision, and complex in its structure. One can never read or study the book without gaining new insights into the nature of God and our relationship with him. The authors of the New Testament read the book of Isaiah in light of the coming of Christ and realized that this prophet anticipated Messiah's coming with remarkable clarity. For this reason they quoted or alluded to Isaiah more than any other Old Testament book.

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Condensed Leader Guide

Called to Serve

Introduction

- ? What types of people are considered “great” in our society?
- ? Does American culture promote a mindset of serving others or serving ourselves? Explain your answer.
- ? Think back over the last twelve months. What are the activities or events you have participated in that you consider to be time well spent?

As we’ll see through our study of Isaiah 6, a better understanding of God’s holiness naturally results in confession of sin and surrender to His will. This is the type of worship Isaiah experienced when he saw the glory of the Lord. He was motivated to surrender His life in service to God.

1. A Vision of Glory (Isa. 6:1-4)

Uzziah’s death signaled an end to Judah’s stability and many wondered what the future might bring. Unfortunately, Uzziah’s last years coincided with Tiglath-pileser III’s rise to power in Assyria and his intense campaign to expand Assyria’s empire. The Assyrian army would soon threaten Israel and Judah. The people of Judah were concerned about their future. There is no doubt that Isaiah shared their concern. As Isaiah prayed in the temple, God transported the prophet through a vision into the heavenly realm.

- ? Why do you think Isaiah introduced his experience of seeing the glory of God by explaining that Uzziah had died?
- ? What details did Isaiah’s vision include about God’s holiness and majesty?
- ? Why might God have determined to reveal a degree of His holiness to Isaiah after Uzziah died?
- ? Glance back to verse 3. How many times is the word “holy” used? Why is this noteworthy?

? For Further Discussion

In times of transition, are your expectations generally hopeful about what God will do or skeptical that He is working in that situation?

2. Woe is Me, Great is God (Isa. 6:5-7)

Isaiah's response to this heavenly vision of the Lord was one of repentance. When he encountered God's holiness, he also encountered his own sinfulness. And because of his awareness of personal sinfulness, Isaiah feared he was ruined. When Isaiah saw God's holiness, he recognized that because of his sin he couldn't stand in God's presence.

- ❓ What three reasons did Isaiah give for saying "Woe is me, for I am lost"? In what ways are we like Isaiah in each of these statements?
- ❓ What in God's holiness drives you to see your own sinfulness?
- ❓ Thinking particularly about times of transition, why does confessing our sinfulness honor the Lord?

3. Ready and Willing (Isa. 6:8-13)

God asked for a volunteer to deliver a message on His behalf. Isaiah volunteered for the task without any questions or conditions.

- ❓ What are some other ways Isaiah could have responded? Why do many believers often leave God's call to serve up to pastors and other church leaders? What trials awaited Isaiah in his new mission?
- ❓ How are we at times tested by God in a similar way? What's the reason for this testing?
- ❓ What are some gifts God has given you? In what ways are you using them to serve Him?
- ❓ What opportunities are available to you, individually or as a group, to serve God through the ministries here at First Baptist Church Lewisville?

Conclusion

- ❓ Other than faithfulness, what are ways we're tempted to measure success in our service to the kingdom? Why are these options so tempting?
- ❓ What do we communicate to God when we pray, "Send me"? What does that prayer reveal about our relationship with Him?
- ❓ What is God calling you to surrender today so you'll be free to shine brighter for Him?

❓ For Further Discussion

Does sin disqualify us from serving God? Why or why not? Why is confession of sin important and necessary for the believer?



Expanded Leader Guide

Called to Serve

Introduction


- ❓ What types of people are considered “great” in our society?
- ❓ Does American culture promote a mindset of serving others or serving ourselves? Explain your answer.
- ❓ Think back over the last twelve months. What are the activities or events you have participated in that you consider to be time well spent?

There is an old saying commonly seen on t-shirts and bumper stickers that says, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” Although this slogan is a saying that is intended to be comical, sadly, many people approach life with the mindset, “What’s in it for me?” God calls His children to a different approach for living. A better question to ask is, “How can I contribute?” or “How can I serve God and advance His kingdom?” God has designed and equipped all people with skills, talents, and gift sets that are to be used to advance the gospel. When we aren’t actively serving God, we aren’t fulfilling our purpose, and we will experience a lack of satisfaction in our life. God commands His people to serve Him.

As we’ll see through our study of Isaiah 6, a better understanding of God’s holiness naturally results in confession of sin and surrender to His will. This is the type of worship Isaiah experienced when he saw the glory of the Lord. He was motivated to surrender His life in service to God.




1. A Vision of Glory (Isa. 6:1-4)

- ❓ Why do you think Isaiah introduced his experience of seeing the glory of God by explaining that Uzziah had died?

-  In times of transition, are your expectations generally hopeful about what God will do or skeptical that He is working in that situation?

The death of King Uzziah marked a significant transition for Judah. Although Uzziah followed God, he foolishly chose not to destroy the high places built to worship other gods. Judah enjoyed economic prosperity during Uzziah's fifty-two-year reign. Unfortunately, Uzziah's success led to arrogance and sin against God. As punishment, Uzziah suffered from a terrible skin disease at the end of his life.

Uzziah's death signaled an end to Judah's stability and many wondered what the future might bring. Unfortunately, Uzziah's last years coincided with Tiglath-pileser III's rise to power in Assyria and his intense campaign to expand Assyria's empire. The Assyrian army would soon threaten Israel and Judah. The people of Judah were concerned about their future. There is no doubt that Isaiah shared their concern. As Isaiah prayed in the temple, God transported the prophet through a vision into the heavenly realm.

-  What details did Isaiah's vision include about God's holiness and majesty?
-  Why might God have determined to reveal a degree of His holiness to Isaiah after Uzziah died?
-  Glance back to verse 3. How many times is the word "holy" used? Why is this noteworthy?

Hearing and seeing played a significant role in Isaiah's vision. The seraphim (heavenly creatures) called to each other in an unending round of praise to God. "Holy, holy, holy" expresses God's complete holiness and otherness. Holiness emphasizes the fact that God is different from any part of His creation. The seraphim were considered holy as well but only because of their proximity and service to God. As servants in God's holy court, they stood ready to go where He commanded. Their reverence for God's holiness and majesty led to an eagerness to serve Him. Our holiness consists of being dedicated to God and comes from the Holy Spirit's work in us. Isaiah's vision was a reminder that, despite the uncertainty of the times, God remained holy and sovereign.

2. Woe is Me, Great is God (Isa. 6:5-7)

- ❓ What three reasons did Isaiah give for saying “Woe is me, for I am lost”? In what ways are we like Isaiah in each of these statements?

Isaiah’s response to this heavenly vision of the Lord was one of repentance. When he encountered God’s holiness, he also encountered his own sinfulness. And because of his awareness of personal sinfulness, Isaiah feared he was ruined. When Isaiah saw God’s holiness, he recognized that because of his sin he couldn’t stand in God’s presence.

- ❓ What in God’s holiness drives you to see your own sinfulness?
- ❓ Thinking particularly about times of transition, why does confessing our sinfulness honor the Lord?

Isaiah 6:6-7 describes how God responded to Isaiah’s admission of sin. An angel was sent to symbolically atone for Isaiah’s sins by pressing a hot coal from the altar to his lips.

- ❓ Does sin disqualify us from serving God? Why or why not?
- ❓ Why is confession of sin important and necessary for the believer?

After touching Isaiah’s unclean mouth, the seraphim pronounced that his wickedness was removed and his sin was atoned for. Isaiah’s unclean lips didn’t become clean because of his effort or desire to change but by God’s grace alone. Those who have done wrong often seek to earn God’s forgiveness. But God forgives sins because He is gracious, not because the person who has sinned has earned His forgiveness.

3. Ready and Willing (Isa. 6:8-13)

God asked for a volunteer to deliver a message on His behalf. Isaiah volunteered for the task without any questions or conditions.

- ① What are some other ways Isaiah could have responded? Why do many believers often leave God's call to serve up to pastors and other church leaders?

Isaiah didn't hesitate when he volunteered for the Lord's service. He immediately said, "Here I am. Send me." When God calls us to His service, our response also should be an unhesitating "Send me." We shouldn't assume His call is meant for people who are more "spiritual" than we are. And we shouldn't just dream of what we can do for God. We should listen for His call and be willing to surrender our lives for His service.

- ① What trials awaited Isaiah in his new mission?
- ① How are we at times tested by God in a similar way? What's the reason for this testing?

Note that this was the dangerous part of Isaiah's conversation with the Lord. Isaiah needed a strong determination to preach an unpopular message during his day. Isaiah's commitment to deliver that message would be put to the test by the people's ever-hardening hearts and by the duration and extent of God's judgment against them. Isaiah would prophesy to a nation where the majority of people would fail to believe and repent. The result of their unbelief would be a devastating judgment resulting in deportation. However, God promised a future, believing remnant would survive and return to the land.

- ① What are some gifts God has given you? In what ways are you using them to serve Him?
- ① What opportunities are available to you, individually or as a group, to serve God through the ministries here at First Baptist Church Lewisville?

Isaiah responded to God's holiness by confessing personal sinfulness and by determining to serve the Lord. When Isaiah volunteered to serve, God gave him a specific task and called him to be faithful to the task over the long haul. Isaiah's success, in God's eyes, rested on faithfulness rather than on results. Isaiah's experience can be, and should be, yours as well. Turn away from sin, receive God's forgiveness, and serve the Lord.

Conclusion

- ❓ Other than faithfulness, what are ways we're tempted to measure success in our service to the kingdom? Why are these options so tempting?

- ❓ What do we communicate to God when we pray, "Send me"? What does that prayer reveal about our relationship with Him?

- ❓ What is God calling you to surrender today so you'll be free to shine brighter for Him?

Prayer of Response

Ask God to give you and your group members attitudes of surrender that reflect Isaiah's. Thank God for His cleansing grace and for the glimpses He gives us of His glory throughout our days.

Family Discussion

Family Discussion Questions for Children

- *What do you think it means to say God is holy?*
- *Do you think God wants you to be holy, too? How is that possible?*
- *What is one way you can serve God right now, even at your age?*

Family Discussion Questions for Teens

- *Is it surprising to you that a holy God would want you to serve Him? Why or why not?*
- *Considering God's holiness, do you have areas of sin in your life you need to confess and from which you need cleansing? What's holding you back?*
- *In what ways are you currently surrendering to God and serving Him? How can you know if God is calling you to a deeper level of service?*

For Next Week

Session Title

- Out With the Old, In With the New

Main Scripture

- Jeremiah 31

Session Outline

1. Building and Planting (Jer. 31:27-30)
2. Written on Our Hearts (Jer. 31:31-34)
3. A Promised Future (Jeremiah 31:35-40)

Memorize

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking: Who will I send? Who will go for us? I said: Here I am. Send me.”

—Isaiah 6:8

Extended Commentary

Isaiah 6:1-13

6:1. When he was 16 years old, King Uzziah succeeded his father as Judah's king and ruled for 52 years (2 Chron. 26:1-3). These facts mean Isaiah's vision occurred around 740 B.C. Uzziah (who is called "Azariah" in 2 Kings 15:1-4) was obedient to the Lord for much of his reign, but an incident in his latter years marred his legacy. In an act of pride he sought to do the duty of a priest by entering the temple and making an offering on the altar of incense. According to Old Testament law only descendants from the line of Levi were permitted to serve as priests. Uzziah was stricken with leprosy for his blasphemy (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

The years of Uzziah's reign were also a time of unfaithfulness by the people of Judah. Empty ritualism and hypocrisy characterized their worship. The death of Uzziah ended a long period of stability and created the potential for a national crisis. God revealed Himself to Isaiah at this critical moment in Judah's history.

Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne. The Bible declares God is Spirit and His essence is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17). John said Isaiah saw "His glory" (John 12:41). Some interpreters believe the prophet saw the preincarnate Christ (a visible manifestation of Christ before He appeared in human flesh in the first century). Others believe Isaiah saw a theophany (symbolic manifestation of God the Father) similar to ones seen by other prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel.

The high and lofty throne was in the temple. According to 2 Kings 19:15, the Lord was in the temple "enthroned above the cherubim" in the holy of holies. In Isaiah's vision the Lord was visibly seated on a throne and his robe filled the temple. Being on the throne emphasizes the Lord as the true King of Judah and being in the temple emphasizes His holiness. Judah had lost its earthly king, Uzziah, but the true King is always on His throne. The people of Judah had lost sight of God's holiness, power, and glory. Isaiah was permitted to see a vision of what they should have acknowledged.

6:2. Isaiah saw seraphim standing above the Lord. This verse and verse 6 contain the only occurrences of seraphim in the Bible. They represent a distinct order of angels and are distinguished from cherubim (Gen. 3:24) by their appearance. Seraphim have six wings as opposed to cherubim who have two wings (2 Chron. 3:11). He covered his face may indicate respect for the holiness of God. He covered his feet may indicate humility. With two he flew may symbolize a willingness to serve.

6:3. The key characteristic of God lauded by these angels was His holiness. Holy is repeated three times for emphasis. Holy is the key adjective in describing the uniqueness of God. Holiness incorporates the sum total of His perfection. Holiness describes the presence of complete perfection and the absence of any imperfection. Objects and places are declared

holy when used in the worship and service of God (Ex. 26:34). God called His people to be a “holy nation” (Ex. 19:6) and provided the law that they might know what holiness meant (Lev. 19:2-4). Because He is holy, God responds with wrath against sin and demands punishment. The vision and the chants of holy, holy, holy do not surprise us, given Isaiah’s consistent and repeated use of the title “Holy One of Israel” to refer to the Lord.

Associated with God’s holiness is His glory. This Hebrew word means “heaviness” in the sense of impressiveness or worth. His glory is infinite and fills the whole earth. God’s glory is displayed in His acts of creation (Ps. 19:1), of judgment (Ex. 14:4), and of mercy (Ps. 79:9). God’s glory is supreme and He shares it with no one (Isa. 42:8).

6:4. The seraphim’s hymn rocked the foundations of the heavenly temple. The smoke that filled the temple probably came from incense. The smoke shielded Isaiah from gazing on God’s face, thus preserving God’s holiness and mystery.

6:5. Isaiah’s response to these heavenly sights and sounds was an overpowering recognition of sin. Isaiah looked at the Lord and then looked at himself, and his conclusion was I am ruined. Isaiah referred to his unclean lips, representing the sinfulness of his whole being. He identified himself with all the people, stating the universal problem of sin.

6:6. Isaiah expressed despair concerning his conviction of sin and knew there was nothing he could do to remove his sin. If the Lord did not provide a remedy, no remedy could be found. In His mercy the Lord sent one of the seraphim who took a glowing coal from the altar and approached Isaiah with it in his hand.

6:7. Isaiah declared himself “a man of unclean lips” (v. 5), and a seraph touched his lips in response to his confession of sin. These terms are clearly symbolic and indicate God alone can forgive our sins. Just as the sinfulness of Isaiah’s lips symbolized all of his sin (v. 5), the touching of his lips symbolized the removal of all his sin. As a result of this act, the prophet’s wickedness was removed, his sin was atoned for. The concept of atonement implies the necessity of payment and a substitute to redeem the sinner.

6:8. After removing the prophet’s sin, the Lord issued a call to service. Salvation must precede service. The Lord sought a volunteer to deliver His message of warning to the people of Judah. The Lord was surrounded by angelic messengers (seraphim), but He desired a human messenger to confront the sinful nation. Isaiah, after he was cleansed from his sin, said send me.

6:9. Isaiah may have thought God would use him to bring national revival to Judah. Instead, Isaiah learned that the people would not repent. His preaching would have a hardening effect on their hearts. The rebellious nation would not understand and not perceive the need for confession of sin and repentance.

6:10. The two phrases, dull the minds and deafen the ears, must be understood as the result of Isaiah’s faithful preaching and not as the intent of his preaching. Isaiah would not conceal

truth or seek to mislead the people. He would faithfully preach the consequences of sin, but the people's rejection of the truth would have the effect of increasing their sin.

6:11. Isaiah understood the difficult mission before him and asked how long it would take. God told him the end result would be judgment and destruction of the nation. God had conditioned the original possession of the land and His protection of the people on their obedience to His commands (Deut. 28:15). Isaiah would not live to see the destruction of Judah, but his prophecy would continue to speak to the nation up to the time of destruction and even beyond it.

6:12. God's judgment on the majority in Judah would be deportation to a foreign land. Babylonia would be the instrument, but Isaiah said the Lord drives the people far away. God chose this foreign nation to punish and discipline His people. They would see their cities destroyed and their property taken, and then they would be taken captive to Babylon.

6:13. Despite the terrible predictions of destruction and deportation, God promised hope for the future of Judah. The tree (terebinth or the oak) represented the nation and it would be felled. A remnant (stump) of people (holy seed) would remain in the land as an indication of God's future restoration of the nation. The mention of the remnant refers to God's faithfulness to preserve a believing minority (Rom. 11:5).

