

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

What does it take to get a Christian to speak up about Jesus? How does God get people to GO for him? If you look in the Bible, you'll find a few examples of people who proclaimed a message from the Lord even though they didn't want to. The point is that God can and will get his Word out: he can use anyone he wants. But most of the people who share the good news about Jesus with their families, friends, and acquaintances, have a couple things in common.

Although they know the weaknesses of their church, they talk about the good things the Lord has done and is doing at their church. Instead of running down the pastor or their fellow members, they choose good things to say. But mostly, they speak up about Jesus because they have a craving for saving.

It would be nothing short of awesome for God's kingdom if everyone who knows Jesus would tell others what he has done for them. But how does God get his people from "busy and scared" to "loving and courageous"? How does he build a fire in their bellies—in our bellies. Let's find out by looking more closely at today's Old Testament lesson. There Isaiah tells us what happened when God said GO to him.

*<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." <sup>4</sup>At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>"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." <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." <sup>8</sup>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!"*

That's what we need: the passion to answer God's call. I wonder if we would be more passionate about spreading the Gospel if the Lord commissioned us the way he commissioned Isaiah. God had a very good reason for causing Isaiah to see what he saw. He had a difficult task for Isaiah. You see, the Lord had decided that he was going to discipline his people for breaking the contract with him that they had agreed to. He was going to destroy their country and send the people

into captivity. And God wanted Isaiah to be his messenger boy. Can you imagine being Isaiah? The people in Isaiah's day were financially prosperous and spiritually bankrupt. Hey, that sounds just like America! They think reality is what they see on TV or in videos, a world where we can do anything we want, even if the Lord says it's wrong. You've seen how our society treats people who speak up for Jesus. In fact, they'd prefer that no one ever mention God—unless someone is really upset: then, of course, spewing out God's name along with other angry words can win arguments or at least intimidate others. Isaiah faced difficulties much worse than these. So before the Lord called Isaiah to be prophet, he transported Isaiah to the throne room of heaven so the soon-to-be prophet could see what reality is really like.

You heard what Isaiah saw: the king of the universe sitting on a magnificent throne that was elevated way up high in the temple. His kingly robe was so long that it literally filled the throne room; imagine the folds and drapes of velvet and satin streaming everywhere.

And then there were the seraphim. 'Seraph' can mean "a fiery being." What an awesome, terrifying sight! Each of these fiery/burning angels had six wings—can you imagine that? They were hovering above God's throne. They would not look directly into the

face of God, and they basically admitted that they were nothing compared to God. Even these supernatural beings, as holy and powerful as they are, must cover their faces and feet in the presence of the Creator's holiness. | But, oh, could they sing! They sang what musicians like to call an "antiphonal song." One group sang over here, then the other group sang a response over there. You heard what they sang back and forth. <sup>3</sup>*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."* Someday we will get to hear the angels sing praises to the Lord with our own ears, like Isaiah did. That must have been quite a song, and a loud song! The praises of the seraphs were loud enough to send massive tremors through the entrances of God's throne room to the foundations of heaven itself.

The angels sang "Holy!" 'Holy' means 'set apart, separate.' To say God is "holy, holy, holy" signifies that he is infinitely separate and above all creation. | And then there was the cloud. Why a cloud? Clouds obscure. They hide. They set God apart from sinful eyes. They remind us that a great separation exists between God and humans. As the divine and eternal Creator, the Lord God is unique, without equal, without peer. Isaiah was permitted to experience with all his senses the glory of God in heaven. Isaiah could see the glory of God, hear it, feel it. Perhaps he could even smell God's glory as he

tasted the smoke.

As I said before, the Lord had a reason for doing all this. When Isaiah saw the awesomeness of God, he was terrified! He said, <sup>5</sup>“*Woe to me! 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.*” Isaiah was feeling what Adam and Eve felt when they tried to hide from God in the Garden of Eden. Isaiah was experiencing what Peter felt when he saw the miraculous draught of fish we heard about in today’s Gospel. It’s that same feeling you experienced as a child when your parents caught you doing something which you knew was wrong. It’s that awful feeling which descends on us when we come to understand that God expects us to be just as holy as he is, and we realize we aren’t holy at all. Just at that moment despair hits you like a sledgehammer right in the kisser: “I’ve really blown it. It’s all ruined.”

I wish all of us would take the awesomeness of God as seriously as Isaiah. Our culture puts pressure on us to want God for a buddy, someone we can put our arm around and slap on the back. Oh, we still confess our sins at the beginning of our worship service, but where are our minds while our lips are moving? Are we always focusing on the words? It pleases God when we speak our confession of sins with the

same attitude Isaiah had: “*Woe is me!*” Don’t ever stop confessing sin. Don’t ever stop being afraid to sin. Don’t ever stop hating sin. God said, “*Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book*” (Ex 32:33). There it is: cold metal grating on hard steel. Sin separates. If we even cop a bad attitude toward someone else, that makes us worthy of God’s wrath.

While Isaiah could still feel his sin searing his soul..., before Isaiah even says, “Have mercy on me, O Lord,” help comes for Isaiah from the altar of God’s grace. <sup>6</sup>*Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”* Could the devastation of sin possibly be fixed just like that? Uh-huh. That day Isaiah experienced God’s forgiveness in a symbol. A real burning coal on his lips wouldn’t have done much more for Isaiah than pain him with blisters. But the angel made the symbol clear so Isaiah could understand: God forgives sin. The words “*your sin is atoned for*” translates more literally, “*your sin is being thoroughly covered.*” And all new infractions against God’s law will be covered with more grace. Isaiah would later proclaim how God can forgive sin when he foresaw Jesus’ work: (53:4-6) <sup>4</sup>*Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet*

*we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*

Notice that up to this point, Isaiah has not done a thing except cry out how sinful he is. This cleansing hot coal of the gospel from God’s altar will keep Isaiah faithful for 45 years of difficult church work. In fact, it sets his heart afire with the love of an eager volunteer. Now all the Lord has to do is ask: <sup>8</sup>“*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*” And [Isaiah] said, “*Here am I. Send me!*” Only a few seconds earlier this same man had said, “*Woe to me! I am ruined!*” Now Isaiah shows courage and a willingness to serve. He doesn’t even know what the Lord is going to ask him to do yet. He didn’t say: “First tell me what you want, then I’ll decide whether I have anything better to do.” No, it’s “*Here am I, send me!*” How is he now willing? What changed? Ah, forgiveness had worked a miracle inside Isaiah’s heart. Courage kicked out fear. Willingness replaced unworthiness.

You don’t have to be a genius to realize that it is as difficult for us to proclaim God’s message in our neighborhoods as

it was for Isaiah to proclaim God’s message in Jerusalem. And so before God calls us to act as proclaimers in the priesthood of all believers..., before he invites any of us to go, he says, “No!” “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1). And then God says “No” to all of our enemies. To Satan God says, “No, you can’t keep them.” To sin God says, “No, you can’t force them.” To death he says, “No, you can’t hold them.” To hell he says, “No, you can’t burn them.” What do you think, dear friends? Since this is the way the Lord treats us for Jesus’ sake, can there be any activity under the sun which is more important than sharing God’s Word. Should any activity be allowed to distract us from Jesus’ prime directive: “*Go make disciples*”? Should our ministry here at St. John’s be about anything other than Jesus Christ as Savior?

WHEN GOD SAYS GO, we first have to say “*Woe, woe is me.*” But then God says, “No.” And with God’s great ‘No’ embedded in our heart, could anyone hear any of us “idly saying ‘There is nothing I can do’ while the multitudes are dying and the Master calls for you?” What could Isaiah say when God removed his guilt and atoned for his sin? What can you say? What will you say? “Take the task he gives you gladly; let his work your pleasure be. Answer quickly when he calls you, Here am I—send me, send me” (CW 573:4).