

"Perspective"
Isaiah 6:1-8 -- A Vision of God in the Temple
Trinity Sunday; May 30, 2021

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. **2** Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. **3** And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. **5** And I said: “Woe is me! 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!”

6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. **7** The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” **8** 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!”

--

In the first Star Wars movie, Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke Skywalker that Darth Vader killed Luke’s father. In the second movie, Darth Vader tells Luke that, in fact, HE IS Luke’s father. In the third movie, Obi-Wan’s spirit comes back to talk to Luke; when Luke accuses Obi-Wan of lying to him, Obi-Wan says that his dad turned INTO Darth Vader, so the thing about Darth killing Luke’s Dad is true – “from a certain point of view”. Yeah, right. In my opinion, this is true from a certain scriptwriter’s attempt to weasel out of a plot twist.

In today’s world, lines like this seem incredibly normal. We all know friends who hold onto a very strong point of view. People sometimes even refer to it as “my truth” or “my perspective”. And neuroscientists have shown that when a person’s internal “perspective” is threatened by other’s opinions, by counterarguments, or even cold, hard facts – that person feels just as threatened as if you were holding a knife to their throat.

Philosophers have spent a lot of time arguing about the nature of truth. Some say there has to be an absolute truth; some say it must be relative to each person. In Frank Peretti’s youth novel “Nightmare Academy”, a school tries to indoctrinate its students to believe there is no absolute truth. The point the book makes is that, in the absence of truth, all that matters is the power of the individuals concerned. And that is not a pretty perspective.

Today’s scripture shows what happens when Isaiah’s perspective – his point of view – is changed by a vision of God. That adjustment to Isaiah’s understanding of the world leads him to make some profound changes in his approach to life – including

making some of the clearest predictions in the Bible about the life of Jesus Christ, over 700 years before his birth.

Isaiah 6 is one of the passages that we can nail down to a pretty specific date. In verse 1 he states that his vision took place in the year King Uzziah died. That places it at about 739 BC according to 2nd Chronicles 26, and 742 BC according to Assyrian historians. Uzziah was very faithful to God for most of his life; as King of Judah, his reign was known for prosperity, expansion, and military strength.

But Uzziah had a perspective problem. Even though Uzziah believed strongly in the reality of God, and worked to be devout, he began to believe that the prosperity of Judah was not a blessing of God. Uzziah thought the prosperity of Judah was because he was a really awesome king. This led him to enter the temple in Jerusalem to personally burn incense on the altar, even though Mosaic law said that only the Levite priests were allowed to do that. The priests told him to leave. That ticked Uzziah off; and during his tantrum, leprosy broke out on his forehead. Leprosy made Uzziah permanently unclean, and he spent the last few years of his life holed up in a separate house while his son Jotham ran the country.

Isaiah was a young man when Uzziah got leprosy. In fact, the events in today's passage were what started Isaiah on his life path of prophesy!

Isaiah, like King Uzziah, was like most of Judah in the 8th Century BC. Isaiah acknowledged that Yahweh (God) was a reality; but he hadn't had any up-close interactions with Him. He pretty much lived his life according to Mosaic law. He acknowledged that he was not holy enough to talk directly to God. The law gave that job to the Levite priests, and plain folk like Isaiah could get thoroughly smote if they got too close to God's pure holiness.

So in his vision, suddenly, Isaiah is in the direct visible presence of God! (Some scholars argue that it was Jesus instead of God, but since they are both part of the three-in-one, I'm not going to fuss over that.) There were these seraphim – 6-winged angelic beings literally burning with devotion to God – and they are buzzing around, singing God's praises! This, obviously, freaks Isaiah out. He realizes that he is neither clean nor holy, and he is a lot closer to God's presence than Uzziah was! Isaiah assumes that he is basically toast, and he says so, in verse 5: "Woe is me! 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!"

But what happens next is even wilder. One of these winged seraphim takes a hot coal – not just a charcoal briquet, mind you, but a glowing piece of holiness and devotion – and touches it to Isaiah's lips. And instead of burning his face off, or giving him leprosy – it heals him, making his speech holy in the presence of the guy who built the universe!

That is what you call a MAJOR change of perspective.

Isaiah is now certain that he has been given a unique gift by the source of all truth and goodness in creation. So when he hears God's voice, in verse 8, say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah jumps at the chance to use this incredible gift.

“Here am I; send me!” and God did. And among many other things, Isaiah let us know that God’s plan for creation was not its destruction – but its redemption. Not a plan of angry destruction, but a plan of ultimate, sacrificial love. A plan made complete by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of God made flesh, Jesus Christ.

And we get to share in results of that gift. If we choose to.

So what’s your perspective? What truth do You cling to?

Imagine 4 beings on the stage: You; your fellow human; Satan; and Jesus.

Is your perspective that Satan and God are far-off concepts, and that your job is to work so that your ideas are better or holier than others? Or to make it clear that your interpretation of the Bible will decide the state of that other person’s soul?

Is your perspective that God has given up on you, and that you might as well do what you want, since Satan’s going to torture you anyway?

Is your perspective that God and Satan don’t exist, and that your truth works for you, so others are just going to have to deal with it or get out of your way?

Is your perspective that God has set a high bar that you just can’t reach, especially since this world sucks and you don’t have the strength of power to fight it?

Do any of those sound familiar?

Well, I am a man of unclean lips, among a people of unclean lips, so I don’t have the authority to pass judgment on your perspective. But I can offer you mine.

My perspective comes from a belief that there IS AN ABSOLUTE TRUTH, created by a holy God who loved each of us before He created the universe. It comes from an acceptance that by myself, I will totally fail to be holy. It comes from an acceptance of the mountain of historical evidence that Christ was born, lived, submitted to our torture, died, arose from the dead, and assumed eternal Kingship over this world. It comes from the heart-exploding realization that, in accepting that reality and accepting Christ’s love, my relationship with God is forever cleansed.

That perspective locks me into one course of action: to learn about Christ by reading the Bible – the love story about Jesus. To listen and learn from God through listening, devotional prayer. To worship God, and love Jesus back, by loving every person on the planet through acts of compassion, mercy and justice. To rely on the Holy Spirit to accomplish this love, and NOT to rely on my own importance or power.

And I can tell you: That. Perspective. Works. Satan cannot stand against it, though Satan never stops trying. God lavishes that perspective with love and blessings, including the blessing of knowing each one of you. And Jesus will never, EVER, stop offering that perspective to each one of you.

I pray that this offer does not cause you anxiety or pain. Instead, my prayer is that it will be appealing to you. My prayer is that you will consider trying it out.

God loves you. And so do I.

-- *Ken Franklin*