

## I. Intro

A. The sermon schedule called for me to preach on Ephesians 5 – the next passage in the *Sit. Walk. Stand.* series. We are in Isaiah 6 instead. The switch being announced as “an audible.” That’s not exactly true.

1. Calling an audible is a last-minute change of plans. It’s when the quarterback steps up to the line of scrimmage, reads the defense, yells, “Kill. Kill. Kill” and changes the play. “Calling an audible” suggests I changed the sermon at the last minute - since the election. That’s not what happened. I started thinking about what I would say on this weekend a year ago, back when the race was between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. And I finished writing this sermon last month, when the polls were changing by the moment. I’m not responding to the results. I have no partisan point to make today. I am trying to do what pastors have tried to do for 2,000 years to help people understand what it looks like to live faithfully at this moment.

2. My comments get announced in a free country – a 21<sup>st</sup> century Super power. A democratic republic moving through a contentious election. A country in which people have lots of rights. Pastors have needed to say things to people living in dictatorships and oppressive communist regimes and nations undergoing civil war. Some of you think this is the biggest moment ever. No. Not even close. We need a bigger perspective. I want to help you better frame this moment.

3. This is not a “politics don’t matter,” sermon. They do. How we get along. How decisions are made. How resources are allocated. How the poor are treated. All of these things matter to God and should matter to us.

a) Our primary identity should not be as Democrats or Republicans. We are primarily citizens of the City of God. But, we are citizens of the City of Man right now and we are to live as kingdom outposts, representing our true King. Retreating from politics is to vote for the status quo, which is not currently a perfect reflection of God’s justice and righteousness. To not be political is to be political. Churches in the U.S. in the early 19th century that did not speak out about slavery because that would have been “getting political” supported slavery by staying silent.

4. This is not a “politics don’t matter” sermon, nor is it “get over it and move on” sermon.

a) Some of you are too angry or surprised or hurt or disappointed to do that. You need time to lament.

b) And some of you, honestly, need time to right-size your out-sized expectations about how good things will be since your team won.

5. And let me remind you, again - I prepared this sermon not knowing who would be happy and who would be sad. You now hear this after a Trump win and a Harris loss. I prepared my remarks for a Trump win, a Harris win or a “we still don’t know who won” outcome.

B. Part of what I want to do today is to remind you that God is more important than election results, so our lives must be framed by matters greater than elections. What I want to do today is remind you that nothing in heaven has changed - God is still God; Jesus is still at his right hand, his kingdom will come and you and I need to be living as his followers. What I want to do today is remind you to be about his agenda. What I want to do today is underline the fact that Presidents come and go. But the call on our lives does not change.

C. What I want to do is help you direct your heart at this moment. Position yourself for the days and weeks ahead – which to date have been more peaceful than I expected. In my newsletter six months ago, I wrote:

1. It can be hard to peer around the corner, but some things seem likely: 1) A bevy of books about what went wrong at Boeing; 2) A season of *The Bachelor* that ends with the bachelor selecting more than one person and everyone celebrating the throuple; 3) A spate of lawsuits launched by de-transitioners against their parents, teachers, doctors, and anyone else that facilitated their transition; 4) Protests over the results of the November election; 5) More and more Supreme Court drama; 6) A fury when the next pandemic hits and it becomes obvious that we are not prepared for it.

2. For various reasons - including the concession speech by Vice President Harris and the comments by President Biden – who said, “you can’t love your country only when you win. You can’t love your neighbor only when you agree.” – I believe we will avoid the trouble I feared. For which I am thankful.

II. With all of that said, let me invite you to turn to Isaiah 6. Isaiah being – along with Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel – a major prophet. (A prophet is someone who speaks for God to the people. The major prophets being those who wrote long books).

A. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem about 3,000 years ago and focused most of his attention on the Jews living in Judah – that is, the smaller half of the kingdom after the division that took place after Solomon died.

B. The book has a complicated literary structure. But for the most part, it just keeps repeating three points: 1) God called his people to represent him - to be a light to the nations; 2) They have been selfish and evil instead. So, 3) they are going to be judged.

C. The language in Isaiah 1-5 is dark. He basically says he’s going to let the Assyrians mow them over. He describes Judah as a tree that will be chopped down. (Later they will hear that the tree stump will sprout a new shoot. Isaiah 11 talks about new life coming out of the “stump of Jesse” (David’s father). So, God’s promise that he will work through them is renewed – and we now know that leads to Christ). But that is not for today. What we get in Isaiah 1-5 is that they are going to suffer. We are going to read Isaiah 6. You need to know, Isaiah 1-5 is full of dark and scary comments. It’s a bad political moment.

III. **In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.** In a year of great political turmoil, I saw God and that changed everything.

A. I chose this passage for us today because it describes a moment of political drama.

B. Uzziah had reigned over Judah for 52 years. And most of those years had been good ones. He'd defeated Judah's enemies and put money in the treasury. He'd had a good run. He'd brought long-term stability. Indeed, very few of Judah's citizens had known a world in which Uzziah had not been king. But now he was dead. And it was worse than that, because towards the end of his reign, pride had gotten the best of him, and as a result God had judged him and everything had started to unwind.

1. We read about this in 2 Chronicles 26. Uzziah had gone into the temple to offer incense – which was the job of the priests. (The offices of prophet, priest and king were mostly separated until Jesus.<sup>1</sup> As King, Uzziah was not to do what he did. When the priests confronted him, he became angry and started yelling, at which point he broke out in leprosy. And that was the end of his public life. He would rule through his son for a while, but not well. And the Assyrians would exploit the situation to grow in power. And now – verse 6 – he has died. The bottom has fallen out. Judah is suddenly in big trouble.

C. Isaiah saying, **in the year that King Uzziah died**, was a bit like saying, “On 9.11, or on Dec. 7, 1941, a “day that will live in infamy,” **I saw the Lord.**

**IV. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. High and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.**

A. The train of a robe – the part that drags behind a king (or a bride) – tends to be longer if someone is really important or wealthy. Commoners have short trains. Royalty has long trains. The more important the person the longer the train. The suggestion here is that the train of God's robe is so big it fills the entire room. You can almost imagine it doubling back on top of itself.

B. This is code for Isaiah saying, “I saw God and He was so majestic that I was overwhelmed. At a moment when I was feeling vulnerable – when I was mourning Uzziah's death and frightened of the Assyrian threat – my thinking was upended.

**V. V2: Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”**

A. Seraphs are a special kind of angels. Their three sets of wings allow them to fly and to shield themselves from the piercing glory of God. They were created to be in God's presence. But God's presence is so holy that not only can they not look. They need a shield.

B. What they can do – perhaps what they cannot stop doing – is declaring that God is holy. They shout it non stop – because pure worship cannot be contained. (This afternoon, no one will tell NFL fans to cheer when a great play is made. Or to sing the fight song. That is what you do.

C. The term holy here is stated in a triplet. Neither Hebrew nor Greek use the word “very” very often. They mostly just repeat the word to be emphasized. This is why Jesus says, “truly, truly I say to you.”

D. Many things get repeated two times. Very few get repeated three times.<sup>2</sup> One is the number six (which means imperfection. So, 666 is imperfection magnified the highest degree). Another is the word holy. It is the only attribute of God that is magnified to the 3<sup>rd</sup> power. RC Sproul wrote a book about this arguing that the most important attribute of God is not his love or power, but his holiness.<sup>3</sup>

VI. The passage goes on:

A. In verse 4 we are told that at the sound of their voices the temple shook and was filled with smoke. (This is a very overwhelming scene). And in verse 5 we are told that Isaiah's response is fall on his face and cry out. **“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 Lord Almighty.”**

B. Then in verses 6 and 7 we have an atonement moment - a Gospel moment. One of the angels takes a live coal from the altar and touches Isaiah's mouth – purifying him. And then declares that Isaiah has been forgiven. There's a lot to reflect on here: 1) the talk about his lips likely grows out of his work as a prophet; 2) we should note that he's not forgiven because he does something good. He repents, is then forgiven and then responds by doing good. The equation is not Faith + Works = Salvation, but Faith = Salvation + Works.

C. Then in verse 8, we get the call of Isaiah. The Lord asks, **“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”** And Isaiah responds, **“Here am I. Send me!”** Isaiah is forgiven. And then God announces that there is work to be done and asks who will take up the assignment. And Isaiah raises his hand. This is such a rich passage. It is helpful and appropriate for this moment.

VII. There are many things I'd like to say now. Many things I think you need to hear:

A. I want to remind you that Presidents come and go but the kingdom of God is forever.

B. I want to remind you that if you're in Christ, this ends well. God wins. We might suffer now, but our suffering is a “light and momentary affliction that is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.” If you are in Christ, you are going to live forever. Play the long game in which God wins. Lean into that. Eternity changes everything.

C. I'd like to point out that if your mood has been dramatically shaped by the election results, your identity is likely too shaped by politics and not shaped enough by Jesus. You need to get your eyes off Uzziah and get them on God. You need a vision of God that overwhelms your politics.

D. I want to remind you that the kingdom of God will never come via Air Force One.

E. I want to remind you that the principal way we advance God’s kingdom is through love not political power.<sup>4</sup> I want to be sure you remember that we are called to love others – including our enemies. And that Jesus’s response to James and John’s suggestion that they call down fire from Heaven on the Samaritans (their political enemies) was to say, “get a grip.” I hear many say, “the stakes are too high right now for peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. Things are so bad – and our political enemies are so evil - that we are justified in doing anything.” No we are not!

1. I’d be glad to argue that point politically. I think it is wrong at just about every level. I am not claiming that we are on a good trend line. There are things that cause me real concern. But I’m exhausted by the apocalyptic rhetoric I’ve been hearing, mostly because we hear it every election.

2. Is this the worst it has ever been? Is this our absolute last chance? I’d take up that debate on the political merits, but I’m not talking to you as a political leader. I am a pastor. So I want to say to you – even if it is! - this is a moment to direct your view to God. At this moment we need people whose heart and mind are shaped by who He is. We need people who have the big picture in mind. Who are seeing today in light of forever. We need people who are looking at what is going on now in light of the coming of the King and His Kingdom. We need people who see more than others. We need people who are not panicking. We need people whose heart is settled by the promises of God.

VIII. And that is just a start. There is a lot more I would like to say:

A. I want to remind you of your assignment to pray for the president elect. I’d like to ask if you have been praying for President Biden and direct you to I Timothy 2, where Paul says: **"I urge that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."**

B. I want to remind you that we should be less worried about the sin in the president-elect’s heart - or the heart of those who voted differently - and more worried about the sin in your own heart. (And did I say to you that I wrote that when I didn’t know who would win?)

C. I want to call on you to help make things better. Many complain about the state of the country, but do nothing about it. Many of the most competent people are so busy building companies or careers that they do little to nothing to shape the civic institutions that shape our society. They have backed away from school boards and coaching kids’ sports and all the rest. And then express frustration over how bad things are. How inefficient, corrupt and broken government is. The implication is that these institutions are going to fix themselves. Some of you are engaged. Thank you. I know it’s hard. I know it can feel thankless. But this is part of having a functional country.

D. A couple weeks ago we had Dr. Robert George – a professor of politics and government at Princeton - speak at a Lakelight event. He is one of the more accomplished and impressive people I’ve been around. Harvard Law. Oxford PhD. Written many books. Appointed by Bush to lead various ethics efforts. Chaired some UN efforts on Human Rights. I would commend the interview to you. You can find it at Lakelight.com. I mention this for two reasons.

1. First, because one of the points he made was that almost no one – including the best and brightest students who show up at Princeton – have a clue as to what is required for a democracy to function. Almost no one understands civics 101 or has any appreciation for how unique – or fragile - the American experiment is.
2. And secondly, he said, “no one is exempt from needing to work to make this better.”

IX. There are many things I want to say to you. Let’s note that Isaiah 6 makes two points:

A. Number One: We need to work to be overwhelmed by God not the moment. We must focus on Him. Major on Him. Seek Him. We need to see everything through the lens of his power and promises.

1. Something is first in your life. It must be God. If you want a life that works, it starts with an ordered heart. And that demands that you see this moment – the politics of today – through the lens of God on his throne.

2. If you want to be the sane, non-anxious presence your friends and family need, you need to rightly prioritize your loves and fears. That always has required work. It certainly does today.

- a) For part of the last two years – and almost non-stop for the last 2 months – we have been told that we need to think about X and worry about Y and hate Z. And much of that has just been wrong. Foolishly wrong. You can see how foolishly wrong it is on the other side. You may not be able to see how foolishly wrong it is on your own. Please trust me when I say, there are people trying to order your loves and fears to advance their agenda. They have set out to turn you into a disciple of their candidate. You need to be a disciple of Jesus. You need to direct your heart to that end and that takes work.

3. The first thing we get from Isaiah 6 is the message that we need a vision of God that overwhelms everything else.

4. How do we do that? It would be nice if we were given the vision Isaiah was given. If we got called into the throne room in heaven. At our small group this week, that was the primary request. We are all trying to figure out what to do. How to think. What God is calling us to. It would be nice to spend some time with the seraphs. We cannot order that up. Very few get that opportunity. But we are given a book. We are given a book that reveals God, that explains his nature and that has a record of his promises. We need our heart to be shaped by that.

B. The second thing we get from Isaiah – that jumps out of this passage – is his willingness to engage. To serve. We also need to respond to God’s call of **Whom shall I send?** with **Here am I, send me.** Put me in coach.

1. What does that mean for you? Well, if you’ve been around, you have heard me on this. You have heard me say that we need to be about loving and caring for others. We need to be about loving our enemies. We need to be the best citizens.

2. You've heard me say that you need to find ways – big and small, formal and informal, inside and outside the walls of the church – to serve others.

3. You've heard me say that everyone wins when you serve, starting with you.

4. And you've me say that I'm of the opinion that the best thing we can do for our country is build his church, because it is unique:

a) There are lots of groups working to make things better. Care for the poor. Establish justice. The church alone is proclaiming the Good News and Engaging in Good Works.

b) You've also heard me say that I don't think the other major institutions – the family, state, arts, education, the press, the marketplace – have a chance if the church is not doing it's job.

C. So, the second thing I want to say to you is, serve. Make things better. Your duties are not exhausted by voting, arguing and complaining.

X. As you leave her today, I want you to leave realizing that:

A. God has things under control.

B. Your job is to keep your eyes on him. To be filled with his Spirit – to be filled with his love, hope, and grace.

C. And to be part of finding ways forward.

D. Many are going crazy. There is no reason for you to do the same.

XI. I want to bring my message to a close by inviting you to join me in a slightly extended moment of prayer. I want to pray for the president elect, for the new congress. I want to pray for wisdom for world leaders. For peace. Courage.

A. President Biden – navigate the remaining days of his office.

B. President Elect – appoint good advisors, navigate the political waters.

C. Governors, Senators, Members of congress.

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<sup>1</sup> There were a few unique figures who held more than one role – foreshadowing Jesus who would combine them: 1) Moses was primarily a prophet but also performed some priestly functions. 2) Samuel was a prophet who also acted as a judge, which gave him significant authority over Israel, somewhat like a king; 3) David was a king and is sometimes viewed as having a prophetic role, as seen in the Psalms. And 4) there is Melchizedek, the “king of Salem” and “priest of God Most High.”

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<sup>2</sup> “Woe” is repeated three times by the eagle in Rev 8:13. “Ruin is repeated in Ezekiel 21:27 and “land,” in Jeremiah 22:29.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holiness of God*, by RC Sproul.

<sup>4</sup> We cannot legislate changes to someone’s heart. The way forward is through living out the gospel and sharing it with our neighbors with kindness and love.