

Talk #4 Re-aligned in Worship –the holiness of God

27th October

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. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ “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.”
Isaiah 6:1-5

The image is of Isaiah standing in the Temple of the LORD, in worship, seeing this vision of God’s glory (**re-focus**). Isaiah hearing the seraphim declare God’s holiness, and being convicted at the same time of his own sinfulness (**re-alignment**). I want to spend some time looking at this passage:

Uzziah King of Judah (2 Chronicles 26 and 27). He was one of the good kings. He became king at 16 and reigned for 52 years and did a lot of good things, he sought the LORD and God was with him, and yet...

But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.... Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD’s temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. 2 Chronicles 26:16,19

So what has Uzziah done wrong ? He’s come to worship the LORD, but he’s done something that was reserved for the Levitical priests, burning incense. He sinned because He chose to worship God the way he wanted to, rather than how God commanded – he didn’t show reverence for the LORD or respect for the office of the priesthood. And there were consequences.... he was struck down by leprosy and being a leper he was made unclean and so banned from the temple, then he died, and he was buried separately, not in the tombs of the kings of Judah. These were severe consequences for a leader of God’s people, who from what we read walked in the LORD’s ways most but not all of the days of his life.

There is a strong parallel between this story and 1 Samuel 13 where king Saul offered sacrifice to the LORD instead of waiting for Samuel the priest, and that decision was the beginning of the end for Saul as the LORD’s anointed king. In 1 Samuel 13:14, Saul is told that he will be replaced by “a man after the LORD’s own heart”. Heart refers to inner intentions and disposition. Both these men, Uzziah and Saul, were leaders and rulers of

God's people, but they failed to recognise that they too were under authority, so their actions, thoughts and plans did not line up with the LORD's. David was a man after God's own heart – although not perfect, he put honour of God first and was determined to obey Him – and repent when he did not.

So, "In the year when King Uzziah died"tells us both about "wrong worship" and the consequences of this, and about the type of worship God desires.

This phrase also speaks about how to respond to times of uncertainty and change. Uzziah's 52-year reign was marked by peace and prosperity, but as his 25-year-old son Jotham came to sit on the throne, war was coming. Isaiah in his vision saw that the true king of Israel wasn't Uzziah or Jotham, but the LORD. And this is true for us too, all our difficulties, sorrows, losses and disappointments are there for us to see that God is on the throne, the mercy seat.

Let's look now at Joshua 5:13-15, on the eve of the fall of Jericho

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my LORD^[a] have for his servant?" 15 The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Many commentators believe the man in Joshua 5 is the LORD Jesus Himself because Joshua falls on his face before "the commander of the LORD's armies" – it's the right response as it is an expression of inner reverence, and of worship. But he is told to take off his shoes, (like Moses before the burning bush in Ex 3) and that's also significant.

By removing shoes, we symbolically strip away the dust and dirt of our earthly journey, our sin, recognizing our need for purification in God's presence. It's a physical act that expresses an interior attitude of humility and submission to God's will - because true worship always leads us to holiness. Face down and shoes off. Reverence and repentance as we come into God's Holy presence.

Tying this back to Isaiah 6, the 6-winged seraphim proclaim the holiness of God (the Trisagion), they also proclaim that not just the Temple, but the whole earth are "full of His glory".

Isaiah's response is conviction of his sinfulness, "woe is me because I am a man of unclean lips" -similar to Peter's response when Jesus called him "***Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord***" Luke 5:8. And this is followed by the LORD's cleansing and purification, and a willing surrender for mission.

When we come into worship, we come with a right disposition, with honour and reverence, re-aligning our lives. Because whatever is going on out there, whatever is going on in our

lives, the central truth is that the LORD sits on the throne, and that should change our perspective, to cause us to lift our eyes to the throne. When we 'see' God we see ourselves.

Secondly, as we come into the LORD's holy presence, we consider what we need to remove. What sin stands between me and God? What defiles me? The LORD calls us to be a Holy people. God's desire is to purify His people. In the words of Cathy Johnson's song "take what is dead and bring it back to life." Individually rediscovering our responsibility to be holy and to flee from sin. This is a word of conviction for us but its also a word of hope. God reveals his mercy in the OT, when the people rediscovered the Law and wanted to celebrate Passover, even though ritually unclean

But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone ¹⁹ who sets their heart on seeking God—the LORD, the God of their ancestors—even if they are not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary." ²⁰ And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. 2 Chron 30:18-19

Finally: This vision took place in the Temple. the Temple is the place of worship, but its also the place to offer sacrifice. In the Old Testament dispensation these included sin offerings (to seek forgiveness), thanksgiving offerings (to express gratitude) and peace offerings (to express devotion).

"Through [Jesus Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" Hebrews 13:15.

A different kind of sacrifice to God on a different kind of altar. We present the "fruit of our lips" to God. Lips that are clean – lips that can seek forgiveness, and express gratitude, love and devotion.

NT passage: John 12:41, John 4:24, Hebrews 4:14-16 – Called to worship in Christ

"Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him." John 12:41

In Christ Jesus, God is seated on a throne of grace.

"God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." John 4:24

The woman at the well. Jesus was inviting this woman into an intimate relationship with him. One in which she would no longer hunger and thirst for things that could never satisfy. Worship of God requires spiritual worship, not just going through certain acts of worship at special places of worship. Not just about external actions or physical locations. Rather it involves our hearts, minds, in connection with our creator. This means that we are giving our whole selves to God – a sacrifice of praise. And we have a deeper relationship with God – our sins are forgiven, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us and we are allowed into the presence of God in a new way, because the Holy Spirit dwells inside us. At the same time we are changed, our heart disposition is changed. The gift of the Spirit gives us new power to live the new life, the character of God is formed in us. The NT shows us that the Holy Spirit is God's cleansing fire.

To worship God in truth continues this theme. It means that we align our lives with what he has revealed to us through his Word. This means that we don't just say the right words, but we live them out. When we worship in truth we re-align our lives and actions in God's Word.

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,^[a] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16

Approaching God's throne – Isaiah did so with reverence and a recognition of his sin, we do so in the same way but also recognising that it's a throne of grace, and so we can approach with confidence, with boldness.

We are running a "power from on high" weekend in April. We're doing this because we want to receive more of the Holy Spirit for our daily lives. We're doing this because we want to be renewed in our charismatic vitality. We're doing this because we want to re-align with the fullness of God's purposes for us as a charismatic community, to open the door to the flow of God's Holy Spirit into our lives- lives that are both holy and reverent, and fully given over to the LORD.

There are several symptoms of the need to renew our charismatic life, and the most obvious one is in our worship where we can prioritise our preferences over building up the body. We want to promote a greater openness to the Holy Spirit so that our community meetings are full of vigorous worship and the experience of the charismatic gifts, where we do all we do in the power of the Holy Spirit. I've asked [xxx] to share about some that have helped her engage in worship and through this we will see areas where we can all ask for more freedom in charismatic worship.

[Sharing on active worship and vocal prayer]

Conclusions – To be developed

Isaiah 6 [OT]

- When we see God we see our sin;
- Sin, recognised and repented is burned away;
- Forgiven people are ready for service and mission

NT

- A sacrifice of praise