

“The Holy Seed Is Its Stump”

^{ESV} **Isaiah 6:1–13:** In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.

Pew Bible, Greenfield, Pages 680-681

Pew Bible, Winterset, Pages 726-727

“How can I believe in a God who . . .

- Allows such disasters as the earthquake in Haiti?
- Turns His back on people who are starving?
- Allows gross injustices to occur?
- Allows events such as the Holocaust?
- Stood by and watched my parents get a divorce?
- Allows some people to get rich while so many more people are poor?

The list could go on and on. I will admit one question that always comes into my mind when I hear such complaints is this. How much of this is genuine and how much is it that believing in God would mean some changes would have to occur in my life? And “I like my life just fine, thank you.” In all honesty, in my life experience I have found that although for some it is the former, for many it is the later. It is a theological “red herring” meaning it is an argument or an excuse which attempts to draw attention away from the central issue.

In this passage from Isaiah, we read a most amazing account of Isaiah seeing a divine and heavenly vision of God. He has been blessed and called by God to speak to the sinful and godless people of Judah. This is a story that repeats itself over and over in the Old Testament – prophets sent by God to warn His people. Warnings they never heed. Judgment ensues. And the promise of redemption and salvation in a Messiah always completes the cycle.

Isaiah’s call from God includes this vision of heaven in which he sees the seraphim angels covering themselves with their wings and declaring the triumphant call: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts which is evocative of the three persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From this point in his call, Isaiah engages in a life of speaking the truth to God’s people.

St. Paul also writes about speaking the truth simply and plainly. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, he writes of how worthless it is to speak 10,000 words in a language nobody can understand. It is much better to speak five words (i.e. “Jesus Christ, Son of God”) that can be heard, understood, and thus believed. The congregation in Corinth would have been a group of people who spoke many languages. Jesus Himself was fluent in at least four languages. It would have spoken Latin to Pontius Pilate at His interrogation. He may have spoken Hebrew on the occasions He was in the Temple in Jerusalem. And He would have also spoken Greek and Aramaic as the common languages of the people. Thus, He was able to speak so that all could understand and many would believe.

As St. Paul describes how it is better to speak small words that are understandable, it is in light of the fact that the congregation in Corinth was very different than ours. In our congregation, we all speak and understand English. We don’t need to have anybody “translate” the sermon because of different languages being represented in our midst. That was not the case in Paul’s day. In the Corinthian congregation, many people spoke many languages. I can imagine that people in the congregation were “helping each other out” to understand what was being said.

We had six high schools in my school district when I was growing up in Houston. With 5,000 students in each high school. And this was just one school district among many in the city. At one time we were told by the school board that more than 200 languages were represented in our school district – Spanish, Vietnamese, Swahili, you name it.

God’s Word is indeed readable and understandable. We have it in very clear and accurate English. It reveals to us who God is and what He does. It serves as the means by which God tells the story of His divine drama of salvation that unfolds in His Son Jesus Christ. It clearly answers our question in describing that the reason for the trials, tribulations, and disasters in life is because of sin. That may not seem like a satisfactory answer to us but it is the truth. That’s why I’m a little wary when I hear that question. Our human nature being what it is, we want to blame somebody – other than ourselves. And who better to blame than God?

We are blessed with the opportunity to speak the plain yet life changing words of God. For as Isaiah writes: “the Holy Seed is its stump.” The Holy Seed is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the perfect promise from God. The Savior of whom Isaiah spoke and who was sent into the world to do what God said He would do. Christ is the climax of the divine drama of salvation. It is of Him and His perfect death that we speak. And we speak clearly. So that we leave no doubt that in Jesus Christ alone, we are blessed with the righteousness of God even unto life everlasting in heaven.

Soon, Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent will be upon us. We set aside this 40 day period to specifically prepare for our Lord’s Passion. Here He endured great mistreatment and suffering. He certainly could (and did) ask why God would allow this to happen to Him. But there is a big difference in Jesus asking the question. He knew the answer. He knew that only His holy death on His cross of crucifixion and His resurrection would deliver humanity from sin and death. He alone was the “Holy Seed” who could reconcile a fallen and sinful humankind to a holy and loving God.

This is the amazing story of God. Revealed to us in clear and understandable language in His holy and inspired Word. How blessed we are to know the very mind of God! In His Son and our Savior Jesus do we believe and trust. Amen.