

Pursuing Spiritual Authenticity

TITLE SLIDE

So it is my turn this morning to talk about the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, so get comfortable... I'm just kidding. I am only going to focus on the 1 chapter, and even then I am afraid I won't be able to cover all the points I would want to.

Isaiah is a meaty book, and from what I have read, it seems to be a huge part of the foundation for the NT, and the signposts to Jesus' divinity, and to who God is. Many of the prophetic texts about Jesus were written by Isaiah, and we see something very special about the relationship Isaiah had with God with I hope we can all take home with us today.

Let's get some context first. SLIDE

Isaiah's ministry started in 740BC, the year that King Uzziah of Judah died. For those who aren't so sure of what the Kingdom is looking like, here we can see that the northern kingdom, Israel, is about to be exiled, and we remember from the prophets Jonah what was going on there. For those that want to know more, I preached on this 4 weeks ago, and you can find my notes on the website.

But this is in the southern Kingdom, known as Judah, and King Uzziah was one of the good kings. And He reigned for 52 years. (More than some people lived). So for many people under the age of 60 wouldn't have known another leader. He was a military leader, a successful one, and he was also a Godly man. He was their protector, their anchor and now he was gone. And people didn't know what to do.

SLIDE I mean what were they to do? What do we do when our anchor in life goes, or something that we have been relying on so heavy for any period of time? (The longer the time, the harder it is.)

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Except Isaiah did something very different to many of the others. He took his eyes off of the empty throne, and put them on the heavenly throne of God. And it's in this action, and what

happens next that we see what our response should be in times of uncertainty and at many other times too.

His vision. SLIDE

Isaiah had a vision of God. He saw angels, or seraphim, each with 6 wings, (each pair had a meaning). 1 pair for the face or the eyes, to show God holiness and they could not look upon Him, and 1 pair to cover the feet. Feet are a sign of earthliness so they are covering them as a sign to honour and respect. I thought this was interesting, but what they are saying is way more interesting than this.

SLIDE And he sees them singing to each other... Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory.

And this is I want us to study this morning, because just looking at God in this way can have a real impact on our lives, and our response is important here.

Now viewing God in this way might involve us adapting how we look at God, but it will also change how we look at ourselves. And we can see this in Isaiah's immediate reply.

SLIDE Woe to me, I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips...

Woe to me... In the chapters before this, the term "woe to you" or "woe to those" is used when Isaiah prophesying judgement on a people. Actually the whole second half of chapter 5 is using this term... But here he is saying 'Woe to me'. He is judging himself. He is coming to a place of humility.

Some may think He is being harsh on himself, putting unnecessary guilt on himself, but we need to see what is said about God to see this reaction.

Holy Repetition

SLIDE The term Holy, means to be set apart.

One thing that we can learn from how the bible was written was in how they repeated words. Many times when Jesus repeats a word, He is saying, truly truly, or (Amen, Amen in Greek). It was a way of getting people's attention and saying, Listen up, this is very important...

However, it's not very often that a word is repeated three times. And 3 times means that it is at a level of ultimate importance. Only once, in each testament is an attribute to God raised to this level. And in the OT is it this moment.

God's other attribute as we know are loving, just and compassionate, but we never read loving loving loving, or just just just. So when we see Holy Holy Holy, we see that firstly this is THE most important attribute of God, and by this, Holiness is at the core of who God is. Above everything about Him that we know.

Isaiah's Humility **SLIDE**

So Isaiah's response to this is seeing himself for who he really is. As I said, this is not Isaiah feeling unnecessarily guilty, but seeing himself as rightly unclean in the eyes of God, and the light of God's holiness. Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips. He sees the true condition of his own soul.

When we view God in His holiness, we need to see the truth about our own condition, just as Isaiah did. So often we down-play our own sin, our weaknesses, and say 'Well we aren't as bad as this person', or 'I only did something small'. It is something that is self-serving and we minimise the reality of our sin, and what it has cost us. **And in that place we can never be authentic.**

So when Isaiah says 'Woe to me, I am ruined', He is saying, 'I can see your holiness, I can see my sin, and only you God can make me clean.' *Compared to God, each and every one of us when we look at our souls as they are would probably have felt exactly what Isaiah felt.*

SLIDE Then we see the angels touching his lips with hot coals to purge his 'unclean lips'. Why the lips you might ask? Well the hot coals are from the Most Holy place from the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12), so these are coals from God's Altar, but the lips are one of the most sensitive parts of the human body.

Has anyone ever had a spot on the edge of the lips? Now and then when I have had a particularly greasy diet, or when I am a bit run down, I'll get spots, and on the rare occasion I'll get them on the edge of my lip. The thing about these spots is that they are so much more painful. The lips are actually one of the most sensitive part of the body, and that's also why kissing is so nice.

Some people think that experiencing grace means that it will be completely painless. Isaiah learned that grace can often mean feeling pain as we receive it, and be cleansed. We need to allow ourselves to feel that pain, so that we can experience grace and God making us clean. **And sometimes that pain will be in the most sensitive of places, and needs to be for us to feel the full force of His grace.**

Because when we repent to receive God's grace, we have to mean it. They can't be empty words, because the role of grace isn't just to make us clean, that's the end result, but the sorrow and remorse is a part of the process. And this is all included in Isaiah's 'Woe to me, I am ruined'.

SLIDE Isaiah sees the cost of his sin, and it results in true authentic worship; and here is where we get on why I titled today's sermon pursuing authentic worship.

The cost of Worship.

There is always a cost to authentic worship. Costly is the opposite of casual. Costly involves an investment. And when we really see and understand the nature of worship, we can no longer see worship as a casual commitment. We can no longer say, 'if I have time for it', or 'when I get round to it'. Or even if I like the style.

I have heard all the excuses of why someone might or might not enjoy or even like a time of worship in church. Some here, some in my previous churches...

I don't like that style, or I don't like that song.

Or I don't like that leader's voice. He can't sing.

Or that timing was a little off at the start.

Or I don't know that song, it's too new or old.

Or no-one else near me is singing so I won't.

Or it's not like Hill song or Jesus Culture worship.

This list isn't conclusive, but they are all excuses of making worship casual. But as we grow in worship, and when worship becomes authentic then we can no longer come casually. We have to come with our whole beings. Despite the style, the leader, how long ago the song was written. We sing with our whole heart because God deserves our undivided attention and praise.

It's not about the song, but about who we are singing it to.

Authentic worship means that we need to do as the angels did, come with our whole person before God, **SLIDE see Him as Holy Holy Holy** and be cleansed as we realise we need to be clean so much.

I understand I have been focussing on worship when talking about spiritual authenticity, but worship is where it starts, and worship exists in many forms. Not just sung worship. We can worship with our jobs, our hobbies, our kindness, our love and our lives. Sung worship is just a practical step to help us get to this spiritual authenticity.

Today we will share in communion, but before I want to give us all a chance to respond to this word with sung worship, but have some time to see God has Holy Holy Holy, seek his grace and worship him with the full cost and the full authenticity that He asks.

Wrap up!

So I am going to ask Martin and the rest of the band to come back up, and while they do that I want to explain about the song. Some of you who may remember this story from last year, but others may not.

The Heart of Worship was written by Matt Redman at the Soul Survivor church in Watford in north London. The church leader, a guy named Mike Pilavachi noticed that the sung worship had gotten stale, and the band had missed the point in why they were singing and playing in front of the church. So he stopped the sung and musical worship until they could worship properly again.

A few weeks went by, and they started to really fix their eyes on God. And it was in this experience that Matt Redman wrote this song. And you can see in the lyrics what he meant.

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I'll bring you more than a song, for a song in itself is not what you have required.

You search much deeper within, through the way things appear, You're looking into my heart.

When life gets rough, the unexpected happens and the first reaction is to despair, (which is a completely rational response), or we just want to get deeper into our relationship with God, and be authentic with him. We need to get back to the heart of worship. We have been blessed to have some extremely gifted worship leaders, and God always seems to send the right people, but whether we have live worship or we use the videos to help us. It shouldn't matter how we come to God. We need to get back to the heart of worship to be authentic with ourselves, authentic with each other and authentic with God. Only then I believe can our lives and our church be truly (truly) transformed.

Let's worship God with authenticity and all that we have.

I'll read Psalm 99 to help us focus on God's Holiness and our where we are, then Martin can start the music, and during this time I want to invite you all to stand and worship God as authentically as you can. He deserves our authenticity and our full focus. **SLIDE** (psalm 99)