

“Since becoming a Christian, God has taught me how to use my story to share the gospel with others. As I practiced this over the years I became more and more bold—even sharing it at work. However, I’ve still struggled to share my faith with my family. It’s not that I don’t have a strong desire to, but I have always been fearful of rejection or building a wall between me and someone I love. Last fall God really laid it on my heart to be more courageous in sharing the gospel with my family, and specifically my son. He and I are really close. He grew up going to Young Life and doing all that “church stuff.” But after going through some tough circumstances in the last 10 years, he has struggled to see how a God could be in the midst of it. We’ve talked about it, but I didn’t want to wear him out or lead him to dread talking to me. Before Christmas I decided to give it another try, but in a different way. I wrote him a letter about my story and how much Jesus has meant to me. To my surprise, he started crying when he read it and expressed to me how much it meant to him. He hasn’t come to faith yet, but I trust that God is working in his heart in the way that only He can.”

Those are the words of our very own Charlie Smyth who used them to tell the story of his courageous next step. His story is an example to us, but it’s also a reflection of the hesitancy and tension many of us experience around the idea of sharing our faith. For many of us, we hear Charlie’s story and conclude, “I’m not sure I could ever do that.” We may feel disqualified because of things in our past, we feel ill-equipped to correctly and boldly share the Gospel with others, or we fear rejection and failure. But if Jesus said, “Go and make disciples”, and he said it, without exception, to every person who knows him as Savior, how can those doubts and fears be overcome so we can live faithfully to our calling?

This morning we continue in our series called *Crossways*. We are looking at the essential message given by the prophet Isaiah and the challenges he faced as he took that message to his own people. Today, we will look at his commissioning, the moment where God calls him to this work. Through his commissioning, we’ll see the three stages God wants to take us all through to make us faithful sharers of his Good News, and how we need to respond in order to, like Charlie, go forward courageously.

**We are qualified when we receive God’s forgiveness.** Our sending starts with engaging in some personal business with God and coming to grips with the fact that, before we can do anything for someone else, God has to do something for us first.

**[Isaiah 6: 1-6] 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” <sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> 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!” <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”**

Isaiah's commissioning begins with coming face-to-face with the majesty of God. We are not sure if he was given a vision or was actually in the temple where God manifested himself (he is invisible but has made himself seen in some way throughout history), but what he witnessed changed him forever. Nothing was ever the same.

Isaiah is allowed to see God's holiness and glory. He is sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and his robe filled the temple. Angels called seraphs are humbly and worshipfully postured, singing out praises to God, calling him "holy" three times for emphasis, and the temple shook and filled with smoke, which often represented God's presence. In light of all this, Isaiah had, what I call, a "whoa moment", and that led to him saying "Woe is me. I'm lost." Other translations say undone, ruined, destroyed, doomed. He recognizes the holiness, the perfect otherness of God, and realizes he not only has nothing to offer, but stands under judgment.

This is where it all begins. If we are to be sent for God, it starts with our own "whoa moment", where we recognize God's holiness and realize how far we fall short of it. As I said last week, God's holiness is like a mirror. Before we recognize it, our evaluation of ourselves is based on our own heart and standards, and we think we look pretty good! But when we look at our reflection in God's holiness, all we can say is "whoa", followed by "woe is me". Have you had that moment in your life? I believe far too many Christians today take God lightly. We fail to behold his holiness and glory, and our faith is weak as a result. I was like that until a spring night in 1999. I was a believer, but my view of God was light and so was my faith. That night, I came face-to-face with the holiness of God like never before and, like Isaiah, realized I was lost. But, also like Isaiah, nothing has been the same since.

Isaiah knows he's lost, he's got nothing to offer this holy God, so he simply confesses that he is a man of unclean lips, a sinner, and throws himself on God's mercy. He didn't appeal to the Law, didn't try to bargain, didn't try to clean himself up first. He turned to God, confessed, and left the rest up to him. While that may seem terrifying, and it was, it was the safest thing he could do.

Because of his confession, God moved. A seraph took a coal from the altar, touched Isaiah's lips and declared his guilt taken away and sin atoned for. By God's grace, he who confessed to be unclean was made clean. Isaiah did nothing to accomplish it. He had no power to save himself. He threw himself on God's mercy and God removed his guilt and sin. The coal likely came from the altar of burnt offerings. It was an instrument of sacrifice, the shedding of blood of one to pay for the sins of another. Isaiah recognized it as the sacrificial system found in the Law, and he would soon write about the one who makes this atonement in Isaiah 53. Isaiah was forgiven, reconciled to God, and qualified to serve in the way God was about to call him.

If we are to be sent for God, it begins when we **turn to God**. It's the only play you and I have, but it's the safest one we can make. We are all of unclean lips. But if we confess it, God meets us there, forgives our sins, reconciles us to himself, and qualifies us for service. Some of you think about your past and think God could never use you. But don't hold onto something that God has already let go of. **[1 John 2:2a] <sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins.** The atonement Isaiah is given points to the ultimate act of atonement by Jesus on the cross. He stood in your place and took upon himself the wrath of God that was due to you. It is finished, and you are free.

If you have never recognized the holiness of God and your lostness before him, I pray today is your “whoa moment”. Confess you fall short of his glorious standard, throw yourself on his mercy, and be made clean. And if you have already done that, take some time this week to reflect again on his holiness and be reminded of what and how you have been forgiven. When we do that, we’ll be ready to respond to the next stage.

**We are commissioned when we accept God’s invitation.** Once we are clean, we are ready, and God is always looking to work through those who have experienced that forgiveness.

**[Isaiah 6:8] <sup>8</sup> And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”**

Upon declaring Isaiah forgiven, God immediately invited him to service and Isaiah immediately said yes. It reminds me of the eagerness of someone in Children’s Ministry. You ask for a volunteer and a hundred hands go up. They want to be a part of the ministry. That’s Isaiah’s response. What a difference one encounter with God makes. Isaiah goes from “woe is me” to “here I am.” His dedication came even before the details. He had experienced the grace of God and now wanted to serve him in whatever way God saw fit.

Do you have this kind of enthusiasm? If not, what’s holding you back? Is it a lack of desire or inspiration? I would encourage you to go back to stage one to reflect on God’s glory and your forgiveness. When we truly behold his holiness and what he has done for us, we shouldn’t be able to keep it to ourselves. Or is it that you don’t feel skilled enough, prepared enough to be sent? Isaiah will be given an extensive revelation from God to share with the people, but I bet the most compelling part of what he ever said to anyone was about when the seraph placed a coal on his lips and declared him forgiven. **The story of what God has done in your life is enough.** Yes, we can train on how we share our faith, and we should, but we also grow as we go. I met with a young lady in our church who has been stirred by God, said “here I am”, and has been on the move, even though she doesn’t know exactly what God wants her to do. But she has experienced the grace of God and doesn’t want to keep it to herself. I know he will meet her in her willingness and give her an opportunity to share the good news.

This week, would you **raise your hand**? This passage is convicting for me. I’m around Christians all week. And I get to stand up here and proclaim the gospel and meet with people and share with them the good news, but this week God put it on my heart to really consider how I am sharing my faith outside of the context of my role here; as a family member, a neighbor, a friend. People know I’m a pastor, but have they ever heard what God did for me? I need to raise my hand and tell God to send me. What about you? As we consider the means of our salvation, as we remember how God responds when we turn to him and throw ourselves on his mercy, consider who else needs to hear it. Invite someone to our Easter services. Tell your story.

**We are sent when we faithfully follow God’s instruction.** God has given us all an assignment called the Great Commission. But it comes with challenges that will test our ability to remain faithful.

[Isaiah 6:9-13] <sup>9</sup> And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ <sup>10</sup> 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.” <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. <sup>13</sup> 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.

Isaiah is to be sent to his people in Judah. He is likely hopeful they will respond to his message like he responded to his encounter with God. But God says that is not to be. The vast majority of people will reject his message, and the nation will ultimately be judged. This is a tough passage to read. It almost sounds like God is rooting against them turning to him. But he's not. He does not delight in judging his people, but he knows their hearts. They have been disobedient, hard-hearted, and Isaiah's message will make their hearts even harder. Jesus references this passage when speaking of Israel in his day. He basically says they can't believe because they won't believe, and God will let people go down the path of stubbornness.

Our city is in the throes of stubbornness...the infamous Leaning Tower of Dallas. Be honest. Who's taken a picture of themselves holding up the tower? This thing is unyielding. Demolish the building around it, but this thing still stands. Hit it all week with a 500 lb. wrecking ball, but it won't budge. That's Judah. God has sent prophets to try to get them to yield, but they continue to dig in. Isaiah will minister for 60 years but there will be little fruit during his life. Ultimately, God will bring in the nation of Babylon to wipe them out and exile them in judgment of their sin and to get their attention so they'll turn back to God.

You and I are sent out into the same kind of world. It is doing its own things, it is stubborn, and it is subject to the judgment of God. We know it because we used to be the same way. There are a lot of people who will hear your message and say, “no thanks”, and we may want to stop. We live in a results-oriented culture. But God is not sitting in disappointment with you because of your sales results. That's because we are not called to save people, we're called to go and tell. Saving is God's job. We remain faithful by continuing to share our “whoa story”, telling others what God has done for us. How they respond is God's business.

And on the days where we are really discouraged, you and I can still **go with hope**. Though God told Isaiah they would not listen, he does end with a word of encouragement. God says that, even though Judah will mostly reject, there will be a remnant, a holy seed who does turn back to God. They will include names like Ezra and Nehemiah, and ultimately include names like Peter, James, and John, followers of Jesus who changed the world. You and I can go with that same hope because our hope is in the God who remains in the saving business. He is working in the hearts of people right now and he wants to use you to draw them to himself. You may be the one that ultimately brings them to their whoa moment, or you may be the first in a parade of people that work in that person's life before they turn to God. Just think. The words of Isaiah may be turning more Jews to God today than they did when they were first spoken and written 2,700 years ago. You tell. God will handle the results.

We're going to close with communion but, before we do, I want you to hear the way Charlie finished the telling of his story. It expresses a heart attitude I pray all of us get to as we consider God's call in our lives.

"Taking this step has helped me even more to realize that I don't need to have the perfect message and I don't need to be afraid. We all have a story and our struggles are some of the best parts of our stories to share how God has worked in our lives. That's all I need to do is be courageous and the rest is allowing the Holy Spirit to work in the other person. There are a lot of hurting people who need the hope of the gospel."

Noah is going to sing over us while we pass out the elements. Spend this time reflecting on the holiness of God, his saving work in your life, and who he wants you to share that with. Give to him any reservations, doubts, or fears you may have in sharing your story with others. There are courageous next step cards in the seatbacks in front of you. If you feel so led, make that declaration today that you will turn to God, you will raise your hand, and you will go with hope.