

Here I Am
Isaiah 6

Introduction

- Happy Mother's Day
 - Like many things these days, this year's Mother's Day is unlike any other Mother's Day we have experienced
 - However, it doesn't take away from the significant impact that our Mother's have had on our lives
 - We hope that all of you Mother's today realize how much we appreciate you and hope that today's message will encourage your faith and your calling as a Mother.
- Forgetting Mother's Day
 - I'll admit that I forgot that Mother's Day was this Sunday until about Wednesday when I just happened to look at the calendar.
 - I'm sure that you have probably experienced this feeling of how time feels absent given the current circumstances that we are all experiencing.
 - It's hard to have a sense of time or even seasons, especially given the way that the weather has even seemed out of sorts!
 - That feeling of absence may extend beyond just your sense of time, season or emotion. It may be the sense you feel toward God.
 - It may cause us to ask, "Where is God?"
- For the past 4 weeks, our sermons have attempted to address this very question.
 - Where is God?
 - As Christians, we know that the Bible tells us that God's presence is always with us, but when faced with the sort of unusual circumstances surrounding the Coronavirus it can cause us to question our faith.
 - When we examine the stories from the Bible of those who experienced a similar experience as we are now, we find that it is actually in the absence of God's presence that God is found.
 - When God seems absent it provides the opportunity for us to seek God with our whole heart, to go beyond the surface in search of what God is really doing and then to wait for God to move in ways that we least expect.
 - Each week we have looked at the different characters: Abraham, Moses and today we will look at Isaiah- all who experienced God's presence in times when their faith was in question.
- Background for Isaiah

- Isaiah was a prophet that spoke on behalf of God during a time when God's people were entering Exile
- Isaiah had been calling out to the people to repent of their sin which included idol worship. But, their heart was not fully committed to God.
- Isaiah's message of repentance was not received until Israel was completely removed from their land and the nation destroyed.
- The Exile marks the absence of God's felt presence
- To move from Exile to Redemption required a renewed vision of God that would lead the people to repentance. You may call this renewed vision "A New Normal"
- Isaiah's role is significant as he represents God's voice during what appears to be God's absence.
- The way in which God reveals himself to Isaiah is significant for how we might experience God during these difficult times

Humility doesn't require anything from God, but waits for God

- Before Isaiah could speak on behalf of God, he needed a renewed vision of God
- **Isaiah 6** is one of the most profound experiences of God's presence
 - In fact, it may be hard for us to put into perspective because it doesn't seem to fit our daily experiences
 - Isaiah received a divine revelation that led to a spiritual transformation in Isaiah's life.
 - I want to read **Isaiah 6:1-3**, and as I read it I want to ask you to close your eyes and imagine this experience that Isaiah has.
- Paint the picture
 - King Uzziah is a reference point
 - Began his reign at age 16
 - In power for 52 years until death from leprosy
 - Contracted leprosy as a punishment for entering the temple with the intent of serving his own offering which was reserved for the priests
 - BUT, Isaiah's vision is not of King Uzziah, instead it is a vision of *"the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up"*
 - This was a renewed vision of God's presence
 - Now you and I might consider a vision like this crazy, but this vision was necessary to counter the vision of kingship that was presently leading the people.

- The present leadership during Isaiah's time was arrogant and this arrogance was not only displayed by King Uzziah but it had trickled down to the people.
- They had become tone deaf to God's voice and hardened to God's presence.
- And yet as Exile became inevitable, the people wanted God to act on their behalf!
- Sometimes I think the reason that we miss the presence of God is because we only recognize God's presence or associate God's presence with getting what we want.
 - We call it "Answered Prayer"
 - BUT, often times God does not answer our prayers in the way we desire and instead of seeing God apart from our desires, we assume that God must be absent.
- Example: Beginning of 2020
 - Usually, I begin the year with a clear vision of where God is leading us as a church
 - This year, I really struggled
 - If you remember, we started the year with a sermon series entitled: "Keep It Simple"
 - I told you that many churches and organizations were using the year "2020" to set new vision or refocus
 - "2020" used a reference to 20/20 eye vision.
 - Keep it Simple was a reference to returning to the basics of our faith and call as Christians.
 - January and February passed, but really without any clear vision for Easter so we kept the sermon series title and just added: "Keep It Simple: *The Cross*"
 - Within just a couple of weeks of that sermon series the Coronavirus hit.
 - One of the things that I have thought about throughout this quarantine period has been the significance of vision.
 - I've often thought, "What would have happened if we as a church had some grand vision for 2020?"
 - Imagine all the time and effort that would have gone into that vision and yet we would not have been able to fulfill the vision because of the quarantine we are now experiencing.
 - I can't help but think that God may have been preparing me as your pastor and our church for this exact moment.
 - I can't tell you what God has in mind for this time in our church or our world

- Throughout this series we have related to how God has shown up in unusual ways whether it be through
 - the increase of people tuning into churches, not only ours but across our country.
 - The opportunity for our Belpre Ministry Fellowship to share each week on the radio
 - The opportunity for us to join together as a community to pray for our medical workers, first-responders and government officials
 - Or, just the opportunity to put a halt to our normal routines to find God in new ways
- One thing I know for sure, none of us could have predicted what is now happening!
- If we only look for God's presence in what we expect or want to have happen we will miss what God is really calling us to do. We will miss his presence!
- As we consider the vision that Isaiah experiences, it is a divine experience
 - Isaiah's focus is lifted up into the presence of God in heaven
 - He captures a vision of God that is unlike anything he has ever experienced
 - The words ring out in worship: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"
 - In such a moment as the one we are experiencing, these are the words that we need to cry out no matter how we might feel.
- These words are words of worship
 - True worship is not what King Uzziah offered.
 - True worship is not the presence of arrogance
 - But instead, true worship is found through the humility that Isaiah has as he seeks the presence of God during Exile.
- Let's keep in mind that God's presence is found in humility.

Humility Leads to Repentance

- What will people say about the year 2020?
 - The year of the Coronavirus or will a different story emerge?
 - Many athletes and sports fans were already over 2020 when Kobe Bryant was killed earlier this year in a tragic plane crash.
 - Now with the Coronavirus, which has in some way or another impacted everyone, it seems there is a consensus that we need a "redo" or "restart"

- Isaiah was transformed by his encounter with God
 - **Isaiah 6:4-7**, again close your eyes and image the scene as I read these verses
 - As Isaiah humbles himself in the presence of God, Isaiah becomes aware of his sin.
 - Keep in mind that Isaiah did live among a people who had turned their back on God.
 - It would have been easy for Isaiah to become self-righteous by separating himself from the sin of the people,
 - But Isaiah acknowledged his own sin.
- Whenever we sense an absence of God's presence, it is good for us to examine our own lives and allow God's Spirit to reveal any unconfessed sin.
 - Sin restricts God's presence in our lives and ultimately His will from being performed in our lives.
 - If we are seeking God's presence according to our terms and not God's, there's a good chance that sin is what is keeping us from experiencing the presence of God.
- What we are going to find is that God wants to use Isaiah, but it is necessary for Isaiah to see God as Lord instead of the example of King Uzziah.
 - It is important that Isaiah respond to God's holy presence not only with humility, but repentance.
 - Isaiah's response to God's presence is what changes his future.
- We asked: what will people say about year 2020, but what will be said of your life during this period of time?
 - This is really a defining moment for all of us.
 - Our lives are being shaken, and if we are willing to humble ourselves, examine our lives and respond to God under his terms and not our own- God can use this time as an opportunity.
 - When we look back at this time, in the months and years ahead, we will be able to see how God has been present in our lives and how he used this moment to transform us for his glory!

"Here I Am"- Present

- Notice what happens after Isaiah confesses his sin
 - **Isaiah 6:8**
 - "Here I am"
 - These are the words that Abraham uttered and Moses when they experienced the presence of God.

- Review- these words mean that the person is present, even in the absence.
- Showing up and waiting on God's next steps.
- The stage has been set- Exile is pending
 - The road ahead is not going to be easy
 - God calls Isaiah in a similar way to the call of:
 - Abraham-Go to a land that I will lead you to
 - Moses- Go to Egypt, lead the people in the face of slavery
 - There was doubt
 - Abraham-where will an heir come from?
 - Moses- I can't speak well
 - Isaiah- "How long?" ([Isaiah 6:11](#))
- BUT, "Here I Am"
 - The response in the midst of doubt is to be present
 - The humility and confession that Isaiah offers prior to the call is significant for paving the way forward.
- We talked last week that it can be easy for us to see all of the obstacles that are in our path due to the Coronavirus, but that God desires to provide us with an opportunity.
 - The response, "Here I Am" is a response of being present despite the obstacles
 - As we put ourselves before the Lord, we acknowledge that we may not know the way forward, but we respond in faithfulness to the Lord.
 - Last week we said that this period of time is an opportunity for us to put our trust in the promises of God.
- We are challenge yet again, to be present even when God seems absent. By showing up we are making ourselves available to God.

A Witness to the Presence of God

- Each day I watch the news to see where we stand on this battle against the Coronavirus
 - One of the reasons that I do this is to see what steps we need to take for our church.
 - I know many of you are asking, "How long will it be until we have church again?"
 - To be honest, I really don't know- It's possible that we might be able to have Sunday morning worship June 7th.
 - That date is somewhat dependent on how our community responds as business begin to reopen.
 - Again, we just ask for your patience as we work to make responsible decisions.
 - It is more than just opening the doors of the church

- We will have to practice social distancing and take additional measures like personal contact into consideration, not to mention the necessary clean up that will need to take place once a service is complete.
- I want to assure you that I am in contact with our local officials as well as our regional Baptist leaders, local pastors and churches as we work together to make decisions for each of our churches
- The question: “How long?,” is a moving target at this point.
- Isaiah was faced with a similar dilemma
 - **Isaiah 6:9-13**
 - Isaiah knew that there were going to be challenges ahead
 - Exile
 - People hardened to the message Isaiah would deliver
 - He wanted to know at what point he would be able to see God move
 - God really doesn't give Isaiah a timetable.
 - It is important to note that God's call on Isaiah's life was not dependent upon Isaiah's success, but on Isaiah's faithfulness to God's call.
- For many of us that is a hard pill to swallow
 - We want the gratification of knowing that we have done something significant
 - We want the results to prove that we have been effective.
 - Yet, that is not what God promises to Isaiah
 - God gives Isaiah a vision that will far exceed Isaiah's lifetime
- This is the difficult part of waiting on the presence of God
 - We expect God to act according to what we desire
 - Yet, God wants us to see where he is apart from our desires
- Because Isaiah is willing to put his faith in the call of God and not the success of his work, Isaiah is able to bear witness to the presence of God amongst a people lost in Exile.
 - **Isaiah 7:14**
 - Isaiah's ministry would not be fully appreciated until Jesus died on the cross many years later.

Conclusion

- As you sit at your home today, living through this quarantine when your normal routine of life has been disrupted:

- Do you have that kind of faith that Isaiah did?
- Could it be that in the midst of what seems like God's absence that you are waiting for God to respond to your desires instead of seeking God where He is already working?
- Would you be willing to humble yourself, examine your life, make the necessary changes that will align your life with God's will and say "Here I am?"
- As I said last week, I believe that this particular time is an opportunity for us to bear witness to God's presence as we place our trust in God's promises.
- For you mothers, as any parent with influence has, each day you have an opportunity to represent the presence of God to your children.
 - Each time that you humble yourself
 - Each time that you offer yourself to God and your family with "Here I am"
 - Each time that you respond not with the expectation to receive affirmation, but to serve your family and God
 - You bear witness to the presence of God
- Because you do just that...today we say thank-you for leading by example.
- Let each of us respond in faithfulness by showing our appreciation to the women in our lives that have made that sacrifice and may each of us take this opportunity to respond to God.

PRAY