

The Wholeness of Worship
Isaiah 6:1-8
May 31, 2015

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "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." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

There is a story told about the devil advertising his tools for sale at public auction. When the prospective buyers assembled, there was one oddly-shaped tool which was labeled "Not for sale." Asked to explain why this was, the devil answered, "I can do without my other tools, but I cannot do without this one. This is the most useful tool that I have. It is called Discouragement, and with it I can work my way into hearts that are otherwise inaccessible. When I get this tool into a man's heart, the way is open to plant anything there I desire."

Discouragement, despair, disaster, crisis. These are opportune times for the devil to invade the believer's heart and wreak havoc on that person's faith. That's why these difficult times are also prime times for worship. Martin Luther said that God and the devil cannot be in the same place at the same time. A worshipping heart has no room for Satan.

In today's Old Testament reading, we heard that King Uzziah had died. Israel was in a state of flux. Things were unsteady. The people were nervous. Uzziah's reign had meant more than 50 years of prosperity for Israel. The question of the day was, "With the King dead, what will happen to us?"

It's safe to assume that Isaiah had the same uneasy feelings as the rest of the nation. However, in the midst of this crisis, God turns Isaiah's focus from worrying to worshipping. Today we will look at what Isaiah learned about the impact of worshipping and holiness on the human heart.

Worship reveals the unholiness of the human heart.

The vision of God's throne forced Isaiah to face his unworthiness and his sinfulness. It does the same for us. Being in the presence of a holy God, makes us aware of how deeply we are infected with sin. Like Isaiah, we feel "undone" and "unclean."

Our condition would be hopeless if it were not for God's grace and mercy. With all the tenderness of a loving father, God meets us at our point of greatest need and purifies us.

Isaiah saw his shortcoming as being of tainted lips. Isaiah belonged to a people who had used their lips to worship false gods. God corrected Isaiah's unworthiness. The text says: *Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for"* (Is 6:6-7 NIV).

If Isaiah had felt his uncleanness was in his hands, God would have touched his hands. If Isaiah had felt his uncleanness was in his feet, the Lord would have touch Isaiah's feet. Our loving God meets us at our point of unworthiness and brings regeneration to our impurity.

- § The fire of worship refines us by burning away the things in our lives that are unworthy of God's presence – evil thoughts and deeds.
- § The fire of worship consumes and burns up the bondage of sin in our lives – addictions and lusts.
- § The fire of worship melts and softens our uncaring hearts.
- § The fire of worship warms our cold, sin-hardened souls.
- § The fire of worship ignites our spirits. When we are turned off, worship turns us on by turning us to God.

Worship activates holiness in the human heart.

Every time the Bible speaks about God's praises be sung in heaven, we hear "Holy, Holy, Holy." The proper focus for praising our Lord is a focus on his holiness, his otherness, his specialness.

Many Christians tend to think of holiness as a state of perfection that we are trying to attain. They believe that if they don't achieve holiness in their lives, God will reject them. Even among those who truly love the Lord, there are those who shy away because they feel unholy or unworthy.

There is a natural human inclination to avoid worship because of feelings of unworthiness. Maybe you've heard someone say, "I'm too big of a sinner to go to church." That's the equivalent of saying, "I'm too thirsty to take a drink of water."

We worship a God who tells us: *I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more* (Is 43:25 NIV). God meets us in our worship of him. Only in our worship will we find the wholeness that we so desperately lack.

The word *whole* as well as the words *healthy*, *wholeness*, and *holy* all have the same root word. When we talk about holiness, we are talking about wholeness. Holiness is a matter of God's wholeness entering my incompleteness. The only way for that to happen is to come into God's presence in sincere worship.

Worship restores wholeness.

The word "worth" comes from the Latin word *axios*. *Axios* was originally used to describe a coin of full weight. In the ancient world, coins were made of precious metals. These metals were very soft and would rapidly wear thin. The more a coin was circulated the less valuable it became.

That's how Isaiah felt. He felt his association with people who were less than faithful to God had somehow lessened his worth. God restored Isaiah's worth when he called Isaiah to himself. God calls us into his presence to worship him so that he might restore our worth.

As soon as we cease to worship, our value begins to fade. Our association with the sinful world, and even our own sinful nature, begin to weaken and devalue us. Each time we renew our worship, our God restores our wholeness and our worth. Because, through worship, God's worth is poured into us, we become worthy.

Worship helps us find our mission.

The mission of our lives is found in worship. Only when we draw close to God through worship do we begin to understand God's purpose for our lives.

After the angel purified Isaiah's lips, God gave Isaiah a mission. Isaiah explains: *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"* (Is 6:8 NIV). Isaiah understood that the Lord's question was actually God's call on his life.

When you worship with all your heart, you will find the direction that God has for your life. Isaiah was called to be a prophet. What are you being called to be? Maybe God wants you to teach his ways to little children. Maybe God wants you to care for and comfort the needy. Maybe God wants you to use the blessings he has given you to support the church financially.

Whatever you are, whoever you are, and wherever you are God has a calling on your life. God wants you to be in his service. Regular worship will put you in a position to learn what God is calling you to do.

Just as we inherit certain characteristics from our earthly parents, in the same way, as we worship, the image and nature of our heavenly Father begin to show in our lives.

The more you are in the presence of your heavenly Father, the more you will become like your heavenly Father.

The fact that God is holy relates to our healing and restoration, not to our shame and condemnation. The Lord has commanded us: *I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy* (Lev 11:44 NIV). Our holiness begins and grows in worship. We will be holy because our Father is holy, and he gives his holiness to us.