

Sermon for Sunday, November 3, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"GOD ON MAIN STREET"

Isaiah 6:1-12

Text: In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne,
high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Isaiah 6:1

This morning I would like to take you for a brief trip into the distant past. Let your mind spin back through the centuries - back past the crusades, back past the fall of Rome, back past the birth of Christ, back past the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, back to the time of 742 B.C. Place yourself in the ancient city of Jerusalem at the site of the temple of the Jews. It is a magnificent building, built during the time of King Solomon, and it stands in all its majestic splendor upon the most prominent hill over-looking the city. Imagine a great stream of people moving towards the temple from all over the city and even from the surrounding areas, picture the roads filled with people moving towards the city. Word has just come that the king is dead. The news has struck the people with sudden anxiety and uncertainty, their hearts are filled with concern. Those of you can remember the reaction of the nation upon the death of President Kennedy can well imagine the somber mood that had fallen upon Jerusalem that day. Among those who moved with the throng of people to the temple was a young prophet.

When he reached the temple proper he pushed his way through the crowd. He was an official of the temple with duties in the ceremonies of the day. He took his place near the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, deep inside the temple where few are permitted to come. On either side of the temple the antiphonal choirs began their familiar responsive chants. Before the young prophet stood the great brazen incense burner whose constantly rising smoke symbolized the unceasing prayers of Israel to God. He watched the smoke billow up as the assigned priest added incense to the heated stones that made the incense burn.

Standing there he must have thought about his dead king. Uzziah had come to the throne at the tender age of 16, and from the beginning he had been popular with the people. Early in his reign he had begun a fierce campaign against the enemies of Judah. The Edonites, the Philistines, and the Arabians were all successively subdued. The important outlet to the sea, Port Eloth at the head of the Red Sea, was taken and fortified. Many of the hostile cities of the area - cities like Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod - were razed to the ground and their threat to the security of Judah was removed. Even across the Jordan, fear fell on the Ammonites and they brought tribute to King Uzziah. But the ambitious young king was not finished. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt and fortified against attack. Military stations were established in Philistia and in the wilderness of the Negeb. So it was that not since the days of Solomon had the little nation known such power and glory and wealth. By the time he was forty, Uzziah was already one of the greatest kings in the history of his country.

But the years had gone by, taking their toll, and now at least the King was dead. As Isaiah, the young prophet, watched the billowing smoke of the incense as he listened to the antiphonal choirs chanting back and forth, as he watched the priests going through the ancient symbolic rituals, he wondered what would happen to his people now. Wealth and prosperity had made them wicked and greedy. They had become arrogant and thoughtless. They had accepted the blessings of God as though they deserved them and at the same time had turned their back on God. Isaiah's heart was fearful for he knew God would not endure the wickedness of his people forever. Already the nations around them would be preparing to attack now.

that Uzziah was dead. Surely disaster would come upon the people unless they turned their hearts to God.

But even as these thoughts crowded through his mind, the scene before him began to change before his very eyes and he realized he was having a vision from God. The anthem of the chanting priests became the song of the seraphim, chanting in the very presence of God, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory." Isaiah felt as though the very building were reeling and the ground trembled beneath his feet for now his eyes saw the very presence of God sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, with the train of his robe filling the temple. His eyes have looked upon scenes forbidden to mortal men and in the knowledge of his own sinfulness, his own unworthiness, he cries out, "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." And then, in the very act of confessing his own unworthiness, one of the seraphim touches his lips with coal from the altar and says, "behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." Then the voice of God speaks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then it was that Isaiah, out of deep gratitude for his own forgiveness, responded and said, "Here am I, send me."

It was many years later that Isaiah was to record his experience, but the details of God's call to him were burned deeply into his heart and mind. As he wrote his story, he began, "In the year that King Uzziah died... The days of the little kingdom of Judah were numbered. Its enemies were already marshalling their forces to strike a mortal blow to the nation. Yet, in the midst of threat and disaster, Isaiah made a great discovery. And what was the great truth that Isaiah discovered in those critical times? In the year in which his king had died, making the beginning of the end, what new revelation broke in upon the heart of Isaiah? He wrote, "In the year that King Uzziah died... in the year that marked the beginning of the end, in the year that the doom of Judah was begun, in the year that our securities vanished and fear filled our hearts - yes, in that year I saw also the Lord."

So you see in the midst of the disaster of life, in the midst of the tragedy that had struck his nation, he saw God on Main Street. God was in the middle of all that was happening. I would like to call your minds back now to our own century, to our own time, to our own world, to our own nation, and I would suggest to you that we live in calamitas times. We live in a time when government at its highest level has proved to be incredibly corrupt; we live at a time when we have suddenly realized, as though we have never known it before, that the resources of the earth are being expended and dramatic changes are in store in just short years ahead. We live at a time when there is insecurity because of the rise of inflation and the changing shift of economic balance in the world and the stock market fluctuating back and forth - a time of insecurity. But the lesson from Isaiah is that God is still on Main Street. God is in the midst of the world in which you and I live. Do not relegate God back to the ancient past. Do not relegate him back even to the time of Jesus. God is active in the events of today. God is in the midst of our world. God is on Main Street today.

The second lesson that we can learn from Isaiah is a lesson of judgment. Isaiah had looked out upon his people and he found that they were people with a wicked heart who had become greedy and sinful and he knew that the judgment of God was falling upon them. "How long Lord shall the judgment last?... until the cities are desolate and until the houses are uninhabited; until the people are carried away into captivity - thus shall the judgment of God fall upon you." Do you think that you and I shall escape the judgment of God? Do you think that a world which has wasted and squandered the gifts of God shall escape his wrath. No.

What about us? You and me! Shall we escape? We Americans have more than any peoples in the history of the world. Shall God hold us guiltless for how we have used his gifts? Oh no - oh no - the judgment of God shall fall upon us.

The Third thing we may find in Isaiah is God's forgiveness. When we turn from our wickedness, when we turn from our sins, God is ready with his forgiveness. You see, we cannot fully comprehend God's love for us until we have felt his wrath and his judgment. But whoever you are this morning I want you to know that God loves you. I do not know what your personal relationship to Jesus Christ is, but I do know this; though God judges you for your wickedness and sin - and surely he will - he also loves you and it is in God's heart to forgive you, he would draw you to himself, he would forgive you completely. Thus Isaiah discovered that in spite of his own sinfulness he was forgiven and when his nation had endured the wrath of God, God forgave them and led them on to new and higher achievements for his purposes. So, God is on Main Street, God's judgment (he will not ignore nor overlook the abuse of what he has placed at our use) comes upon us. God seeks to forgive us everyone.

Then a Fourth lesson from Isaiah is this: it is God's desire to reach out to all men who do not know him, who have turned their backs on him, who violate his laws, who break his commandments, who do not hear his word. It is his desire for them to know of his love and his forgiveness and so he said to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, who will go for us. Who will tell the world that God requires of them to be obedient to his holy laws, who will tell the world that God expects righteousness and justice to flow down like water, who will tell the people that I love them?" That's always the task of God's people--the missionary task to go out into the world where men are lost and judged and to say to them God loves you - return to him, be obedient to his laws. In response Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me. I would like for us to think about that in terms of this congregation collectively and for each of us individually. God has given us so much and he gives us most of all forgiveness and he says to the church, "Go share with lost men my love for them - and who will go for me - whom shall I send?" And I think about this city of ours, of the sin and the corruption and the wickedness and the evil, and I wonder who in this city shall go for God, Who shall be a light shining in darkness? Who shall hold up Jesus Christ? And I think--I will--this church will. Is that true? Will we? You see, next Sunday is Budget Sunday and I don't want to try to scare you into giving or anything else, but I want to say to you in all honesty as your Pastor whom God has called here to speak his word to you, you have so much. Do you think God is going to overlook it when you do not use what you have for him? Oh, no! You shall not escape his judgment if you are not faithful. But I say to you God has forgiveness for you and if you will turn to him and if you will respond to his call then God will bless us and this church in a way you have never dreamed. We have a big budget next year - not really - but you know if all of us tithe we could have a budget three, four, five times as large. Will a man rob God? Oh yes - He will rob God! It's going to require all of us being serious about our commitment. And between now and next Sunday I want you to be thinking about it and praying about it---God is in our world---Yes. God is in judgment upon his people who are wicked and sinful and who do not do what he requires of them, but God is forgiving and he calls us to mission. You know churches today are going through a difficult time. God blessed the churches. He gave them so much in material goods. He gave them leadership such as we never dreamed of and the church failed. The church was disobedient, the church was rebellious and it wasted and squandered the gifts of God and today God has the church under judgment and the church is declining in membership, it's declining in attendance, it's declining in attendance, it's declining in its giving, the membership of most major denominations is shrinking. God is judging the church. Here he has blessed us. But let me assure you, unless we respond to God he will judge this church also for

to whom much is given, the Bible says, much is required. That means us. The call comes, whom shall I send and who will go for us? Will we? Will you? That's the question we'll have to answer next Sunday.

The third thing we try to do is to make it clear that the call is not just for the few who are called, but for all of us. We cannot really understand the call unless we see it in the light of the Lord's promise to us. It is not just a matter of being called, but of being able to answer that call. We must be ready to go when the call comes. We must be willing to sacrifice, to give up our own plans and desires for the sake of the Kingdom of God. We must be willing to go wherever the Lord leads, and to do whatever He commands. This is the true meaning of the call. It is a call to holiness, to service, and to sacrifice. It is a call to be like Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us to Himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good deeds.

Then a fourth lesson we learn from the Bible is that the call is not just for the few who are called, but for all of us. We cannot really understand the call unless we see it in the light of the Lord's promise to us. It is not just a matter of being called, but of being able to answer that call. We must be ready to go when the call comes. We must be willing to sacrifice, to give up our own plans and desires for the sake of the Kingdom of God. We must be willing to go wherever the Lord leads, and to do whatever He commands. This is the true meaning of the call. It is a call to holiness, to service, and to sacrifice. It is a call to be like Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us to Himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good deeds. We must be ready to go when the call comes. We must be willing to sacrifice, to give up our own plans and desires for the sake of the Kingdom of God. We must be willing to go wherever the Lord leads, and to do whatever He commands. This is the true meaning of the call. It is a call to holiness, to service, and to sacrifice. It is a call to be like Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us to Himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good deeds.