

Last week we began a series called, “Get A Life.” We’re talking about spiritual transformation or how to live out the life God offers. We all have bios or biological life. Bios begins at conception. But zoe, eternal and abundant life, requires a second birth, a new birth. When I respond to Jesus’ invitation to trust Him and to “Follow me,” I begin a relationship that will change my desires, my priorities and my ultimate goal in life. I am no longer as passionate about improving my bios as I am living the zoe found only in a relationship with God through Christ. But what then?

Spiritual transformation begins with a vision. Unless I can visualize what life with God should look like I will lack the motivation to pursue it. Great leaders are men and women of vision. Jesus painted a word picture of a kingdom ruled by a glorious king and proceeded to demonstrate aspects of that kingdom. We remember another visionary this weekend who once said: (see MLK, “I have a dream,” speech below)

Do you have a dream, a vision, of what life with God would look like? How would your life be different if you lived the life God intended you to live? Where would we get a vision of such a life? The Bible is a good place to start. It is a reliable guide for our own spiritual transformation so let’s examine the experience Isaiah writes about when he came face to face with the majesty of God in Is. 6. Isaiah was given...

I. A Vision of God’s Glory...vv. 1-4. The first step toward spiritual transformation is to see God for who He really is. Have you ever heard someone say, “I don’t believe in God?” When I hear that, I want to say, “Tell me what kind of God you don’t believe in because I may not believe in that kind of God either. We learn some important truths about God in this text?

1. God is eternal...v. 1. “In the year that King Uzziah died...” is not merely a time signature. It is not there just to tell us when this vision occurred. This is an intentional contrast between the sovereign king of the earth and the Sovereign King of the universe. To Isaiah’s listeners there was no one more powerful than the king. But He died. 50 years from now every major head of state will be dead. A hundred years from now we will all be dead and there will be 10 billion people alive on this planet. God was there in the garden. God was there when the pyramids were built. God was there before Alexander became Great. God was there when Columbus discovered a new world. God is here today. He is the living God, the same yesterday, today and forever. Listen to the Psalmist:

Ps. 102:11-12 “My days are like a lengthened shadow; And I wither away like grass. But Thou, O LORD, dost abide forever; And Thy name to all generations. 102:19-21 For He looked down from His holy height; From heaven the LORD gazed upon the earth, To hear the groaning of the prisoner; To set free those who were doomed to death; That *men* may tell of the name of the LORD in Zion, And His praise in Jerusalem; 102:25-27 Of old Thou didst found the earth; And the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. But Thou art the same, And Thy years will not come to an end.”

Spiritual transformation requires shifting our focus from that which is temporal to that which is eternal. “All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field...The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.” **Isaiah 40:6, 8**

2. God is supreme...v. 1. He is seated on a throne, He rules. Isaiah didn't see God plowing a field or rowing a boat. He saw Him seated on a throne because He has authority over all things. He is the Creator of all things. There is no higher authority than God. He can rescue us or He can condemn us. Virginia Owens cuts right to the heart of it:

“Let us get this one thing straight. God can do anything he damn well pleases, including damn well. And if it pleases him to damn, then it is done, *ipso facto*, well. God's activity is what it is. There isn't anything else. Without it there would be no being, including human beings presuming to judge the Creator of everything that is.” Virginia Stem Owens, Reformed Journal, Dec. 1983

It is good to remember that no matter who rules North Korea, or Iran, or Venezuela, or even the United States, God is greater. He doesn't exist to serve us. We exist to serve Him.

3. God is glorious. The train of His robe filled the temple (v. 1) and the whole earth is full of His glory. (v. 3). When I think of a train filling the temple I think of the last two royal weddings. The most recent was of Prince William and Kate Middleton. Kate's Royal Wedding dress was inspired by the dress worn by Grace Kelly for her wedding to Prince Ranier in 1956. The modern Victorian dress had 58 organza covered buttons. The fabric was a mix of English lace and French Chantilly lace. Hand embroidered by the Royal School of Needlework, the lace applique includes flowers to represent each area of the British Isles – roses for England, thistles for Scotland, daffodils for Wales and shamrocks for Ireland. The veil is made from layers of ivory silk tulle and finished with hand sewn flowers and, the beautifully embroidered train measures just over 8ft. Three decades earlier, Princess Diana's wedding dress was adorned with 10,000 pearls and a 25 foot train that followed her down the aisle of St. Paul's Cathedral. The world watched these glorious events that were full of pomp and circumstance. The vision of God's robe filling the entire heavenly temple conveys a sense of resplendent glory. In fact, the whole earth is full of His glory.

The word “glory” is *kabod*, which literally means heavy. God is the most important person in the universe. God is a very important person and He doesn't like being taken for granted.

4. God is holy...vv. 3-4. Holiness is one of the most difficult words in the Bible to understand. That may be because we know so little about it. The root of the word means “to separate.” Holiness is a word that reflects the fact that God is set apart or distinguished from everything He created. He is in a class by Himself. Holiness is the God's central characteristic. The seraphim say, “Holy, holy, holy.” If you picked up a big rock and saw another and said, “That rock is big, big, big,” you would be emphasizing the size of the rock. Almost anything can be called holy if it is separated from what is common and devoted to God. In fact, God commands us, “Be holy as I am holy.” If it were not possible to be holy God would not have commanded it.

God is worthy to be worshiped. These angelic beings called seraphim never again appear in scripture. We don't know what they are but it is clear they are not chubby-cheeked angels harmlessly fluttering around the temple. When they speak the foundations of the temple shake. They are more like the Navy's Blue Angels than angels in a baby's nursery. Even they cannot look upon the Lord nor do they feel worthy to have their feet exposed in the presence of the Lord. They must have been impressive in their appearance yet they pale in comparison to the glory of God. They worship Him because He is the only rightful object of our worship.

There is no one like God. God is the absolute reality beyond which there is only more of God. He is holy. The more aware I become of who God is the more aware I become of who I am. I begin to understand myself. That's what happens to Isaiah in verse 5.

II. A Vision of Human Brokenness...v. 5. . When confronted with the majesty and holiness of God we become painfully aware that we are unclean. Isaiah is a broken man. He gazes upon God's holiness and concludes that he is a man of unclean lips. Why lips? Because the lips spew out what has been brewing on the inside. Jesus said, **“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45.** In the presence of God and of majestic beings who are praising God with their lips he realizes that he is flawed and feels unworthy to praise God with his lips. His lips are tainted by sin and have been used to criticize and curse and he is conscious of his uncleanness. Spiritual transformation cannot happen unless we see ourselves as God sees us. And God sees us as people of unclean lips. What do we do when we get a vision of who God is and realize we are flawed?

It seems there are two common ways to deal with the problem. We can excuse ourselves or condemn ourselves. The first approach is often supported by popular psychology which says, “I'm OK, you're OK.” You are not a sinner. You are a victim of all these people who talk about things like sin. You're normal. Accept yourself, love yourself, assert yourself, because you have a right to be happy.”

The other common approach is often employed by religious people. We condemn ourselves – and everyone else. We are told, “If you want to be right with God you have to keep the rules. In fact, we will help you. Every time you violate a rule we will make you miserable.” Real religious people even go one step further and make rules to protect the rules.

Notice that the solution for Isaiah was not a human solution...vv. 6-7. The solution wasn't to try and feel good about himself. It wasn't to try harder to be holy. The only way he would ever be free of his sin and his guilt was to accept God's provision for his sin. We cannot heal ourselves. Only God can heal. That is true physically as well as emotionally. Listen to this insightful observation from Mark McMinn.

“If the human body were not capable of repairing itself, by the time we reached adulthood, each of us would be an ugly mass of abrasions, bruises, incisions, and infections. Fortunately, each mosquito bite, scrape, and injury is healed by a sophisticated physiological repair system that restores us to health. Similarly, if there were no way to repair injured interpersonal relationships, each of us would have a long list of enemies. People on the list would include both those who have treated us poorly and those we have hurt with insensitive words and actions. Fortunately,

as with our physical bodies, we have been graciously granted an interpersonal healing mechanism so that we do not have to develop such a list. **Forgiveness is God's gift, modeled perfectly in the work of Jesus Christ and reflected dimly but frequently in human interactions. But there is an important difference. Physiological healing is autonomic and effortless; our body does the work in the background of consciousness. Interpersonal healing, in contrast, usually requires deliberate work, conscious effort, and often extraordinary courage.**" McMinn, *Psychology, Theology and Spirituality*, p. 205

The process of examining ourselves before a holy God is as painful as touching a burning coal to our lips. But unless we courageously yield ourselves to God for His healing in our lives, we will stall out in the process of spiritual formation and we will continue to live with serious spiritual handicaps. Notice what happens once we have surrendered to the process...v. 8.

As Isaiah's vision of God changed so did his view of himself. Once you have seen God for who He is and seen yourself for who you are and you have received God's provision for your sin, you are free...free to serve. When we see the Lord for who He is and acknowledge who we are before Him we can obtain forgiveness and be transformed into the image of His obedient servant. **The revelation of the Lord in glory transforms the lives of God's servants and inspires them for service.**

A few years ago I did the wedding of a couple in our church. I asked them how they met and they told me a wonderful story. They met at an airport as they were waiting to get on a flight. They were both on the stand-by list and they started talking about their chances of getting on. They said it was a terrible night to fly. There were storms all over the area and flights were delayed in and out of the airport. As "luck" would have it, they ended up sitting next to each other on the flight and the conversation continued. The truth is they were falling in love. They told me it was an amazing experience. The flight was truly a white-knuckle experience as the plane pitched and rolled all over the sky. The windows lit up each time the lightning flashed and you could feel the tension in the plane as people squeezed their arm rests like you do in the dentist's chair when you're getting a root canal. As they related the story they said, "We hardly noticed what was going on outside the airplane." The relationship that was forming was so strong and so alluring that nothing else mattered at that moment.

Transformation begins as we gaze upon the lover of our soul. Isaiah was so captivated by the majesty of God that nothing else mattered. In his self-consciousness he felt completely inadequate until God touched his lips, removed his guilt and a transformation began.

(Announce: Lumps: Invitation to men's study group
Wednesday Bible Study starts January 25 at the Melting Pot)

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."