

Defining Moments:
Historical Moments
Isaiah 6:1-8

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Text Introduction: Our lives are sprinkled with defining moments—moments that shape the rest of our lives, moments that are so important that the rest of our lives hang in the balance of these moments. We are studying from Scripture some of these defining moments that dot our lives. You may not experience every single one of them, but you will experience most of them. So far, we have started with our physical births and our spiritual births. If we are going to talk about moments in life that define us, it seems reasonable and practical to start with our births—both physical and spiritual. We have also talked about baptism. Last week, we talked about getting married. Today, we talk about historical moments. (Moments that define history; moments that everyone knows about.) God uses historical moments in our lives to get our attention.

We turn our attention this morning to the book of Isaiah and a pretty familiar text in Isaiah.

Text: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and His robe filled the temple. ²Seraphim were standing above Him; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; His glory fills the whole earth.

⁴The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵Then I said:

Woe is me for I am ruined
because I am a man of unclean lips
and live among a people of unclean lips,
and because my eyes have seen the King,
the LORD of Hosts.

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth with it and said:

Now that this has touched your lips,
your wickedness is removed
and your sin is atoned for.

⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying:

Who should I send?
Who will go for Us?
I said:
Here I am. Send me.

Introduction—World War II, the assassination of JFK, the Space Shuttle Disaster in 1986 and again in 2003, the OKC Bombing in 1995, 9-11, Hurricanes—What do they all have in common? They are historical moments that impact life. They change things. September 11, 2001, changed our world. Some defining moments are historical moments that link all of us.

Isaiah lived in uncertain times. The first phrase of our text underscores these chaotic times: “In the year that King Uzziah died.” This was a defining, historical moment in Isaiah’s lifetime. The books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles reveal that Uzziah reigned for 52 years as King over Judah. Remember that kings in this period of history were recorded as either good or bad according to their record of obedience to God. Uzziah is recorded as a good king. He was a strong military leader. He had weapons that were advanced for his time that shot arrows and hurled large stones from towers. In sum, Uzziah’s reign was a good reign. His death brought uncertainty. Would the next king bring this same kind of reign? Would the new king lead the people closer to God or farther away from God? For a person like Isaiah who earnestly and eagerly sought after God, these were difficult times. These difficult times led to a defining moment for Isaiah—a moment that would change his life forever.

The Progression from Disaster to Defining Moment

How can historical moments of crisis and disaster become defining moments? These historical moments become defining when we allow the moment to cause us to ...

1. Look Upward!

Where does Isaiah go in the midst of these chaotic and uncertain times? He is in the Temple. He is in worship. The Psalmist asked an important question when he asked, “When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Then comes the answer, “The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven.” (Psalm 11:3-4) As Isaiah worships, He encounters God. As he encounters God in worship, Isaiah is reminded of ...

- God’s Sovereignty—Where is God? He is seated on the throne.
- God’s Holiness
- God’s Presence

The sum of what Isaiah experiences is that although King Uzziah is dead, God is very much alive.

A young man was making his first climb in the Alps. Making the climb with guides he felt safe. As he reached the summit, the guides wanted the young man to get the first view. As the young man arrived, he leaped to his feet, but the guide quickly dragged him down. “On your knees, sir!” he shouted. “You are never safe here except on your knees.”

May we all learn that we are only safe when our constant focus is worship.

My predecessor and pastor of this church for 47 years, Bro. Perry Sanders had a habit of signing his letters and ending his phone conversations by the signature phrase “Keep Looking Up!” In the midst of uncertain times, we can do no better than to keep looking up.

2. Look Inward!

Recognition of Sin

Times of uncertainty ought to cause us to look within. Actually, for Isaiah, this is a by-product of his upward look. Because Isaiah sees the holiness of God, his attention is taken from the situation around him to the sin within him. Notice the first part of his confession: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips." Isaiah enters the Temple trembling concerning his situation, but in meeting God, he trembles at his sin.

Only after Isaiah acknowledges his own sin does he mention the sin of the ones around him. We usually get this backward.

Recognition of Grace

At this point, you may be ready to ask, "How does this recognition of sin in my life cause me to feel better?" The answer is discovered in verses 6 and 7. Isaiah sees God as the one who is cleansing his life from sin. Notice how God is the one who is purging from sin.

Saturday, March 29, 2008, was Expungement Day in New Orleans. The event, sponsored by the Orleans Parish public defender's office, drew some 400 people eager to get their criminal records cleaned up. The idea was to clear the records of those who feel they have been falsely charged or otherwise dealt with but the charge was still on their record.

Consuello Anderson took advantage of the day. Consuello had a good job as a personal care attendant in which she cared for the elderly and sickly. Then, a background check revealed a quarter-century old charge against her for theft and she was fired. The fact that the thief was actually her baby did not matter.

On Expungement Day, Consuello presented her evidence and told her story. Back in 1984, as she was leaving her pediatrician's office with her 14 month old son, the child grabbed an otoscope, the lamp used to examine children's ears, and carried it with him. She was holding him in one arm and the baby bag in the other as they were rushing to get into the elevator at Charity Hospital. She was late for work and sprinted down the sidewalk, just making her bus. She noticed her son was carrying the otoscope--"he was at that age where they pick everything up"--and she meant to return it.

The next time she thought about it was when the police knocked at her door. She was 17 years old. She gave the scope back, but the cops arrested her. She says she didn't get the best legal help and was convicted of theft. It was a minor rap, but getting fired "made me feel like I got a lifetime sentence without parole." A lawyer helped her file for expungement.¹

Every person can have an Expungement Day when it comes to our sin. Maybe the circumstances of our world is just what some need to recognize first sin, but then to recognize the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Joe McKeever, April 30, 2008 Blog.

I have had this kind of moment in life when a historical moment caused me to look within. In 2002, Hurricane Lily was supposed to do to New Iberia what Katrina did to New Orleans. In fact, the local Sheriff told me later that he was asked by the Hurricane Center, "How many body bags do you have available?"

Thankfully, at the 11th hour, winds decreased and the city was largely spared. In that experience, I was convicted by the fact that I cared too much about my stuff.

3. Look Outward!

Finally, in the midst of uncertain times we need to look outward. In this experience of being in the Temple, God ultimately calls Isaiah to be a prophet. God needs people in uncertain times to speak a word in the mist of the chaos. The truth is many are overwhelmed. Many are looking to see if there is any hope. Many will look to the church, but only see similar panic and chaos.

Notice the progression for Isaiah.

- (1) Eyes on Himself
- (2) Eyes on God
- (3) Eyes on himself, but now on his sin
- (4) Eyes on God, but now leads to confession
- (5) Eyes on himself, but now for others

Later in this passage, Isaiah said to the LORD, "Until when, LORD?" We see the answer from God. When things grow worse, we keep sounding the alarm. We are witnesses!

So What?

- **God uses historical moments to capture our attention.**
Allow God to take our worry and turn it into worship. Allow God to take our worship and turn it into witness.
- **Will historical moments keep our attention?**
Not unless we turn to God.

The best worship experience of my life was the Sunday after 9-11. I will never forget it. I don't want to forget it. My experience was similar to that of many. But sadly, we have to admit that we do not allow God to continue to keep our attention.

Revelation 3:20 says, "Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me.

God is always knocking, but we are not always hearing. So, if we hear, let us open!