

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two he covered his face. With two he covered his feet. With two he flew. One called to another, and said, "Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!" The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. He touched my mouth with it, and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin forgiven." I heard the Lord's voice, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!"

I've built one custom car and one custom motorcycle. I'm currently off-again/on-again working on a 1947 Pontiac for Andrea. The problem is that when I had time I had no money and it seems that when I have money I have no time.

Anyway, if you build a custom anything, that means that you fabricate parts and pieces or make other pieces and make them fit. When I am fabricating a body part of some kind, I often take a piece of cardboard and cut a pattern out of cardboard and then I trial-fit the pattern. When the pattern is just right, then I used it to cut the steel in the right shape.

On Andrea's car, we talked about changing the grill opening so we made some patterns out of cardboard and we even painted them and put them in place to see how they looked.

Patterns are also used to make clothes. Do any of you sew—make clothes and such things? I have, off and on for years. When I was a teenager, my mom bought a sewing machine and never learned how to use it—so I did. I don't sew often, but I can if I need to. Years ago, we needed a slipcover for a sofa and I made one. I cut a pattern out of taped-together newspapers. It would have been a lot easier to buy a pattern, but there wasn't one available.

Now, who said that you sew?

You can hold your hands up—it's OK you aren't volunteering to sew anything.

Those who held up their hands know this, but for the rest of you, when you buy a pattern in a fabric shop, you often get "extra patterns." I mean that if you buy a pattern for a shirt, there will often be a vest pattern included. Maybe even a tie pattern. Kind of a "three-for-one" thing.

That "three-for-one" thing is one thing that happened to me as I was studying this passage. I was looking at it primarily as a pattern for worship—a way to see how we can best worship God, both as a group and personally. The passage does work for that and it works well. It also seems to good a good pattern for prayer and a pattern for our overall relationship to God.

The scripture I read is often called “the commissioning of Isaiah.” Isaiah was a prophet of God about 700 years before the birth of Jesus. When he was called out, he had a vision and in that vision we find things that one can hardly imagine.

Not only did he see the very attendants of God—he saw God himself. In his writings, Isaiah describes the power and the majesty of God, but not his person—not his being. When Isaiah writes that the train of God's robe filled the temple, he is speaking not of his robe but of his glory and righteousness.

His glory filled the space.

We DO get a fairly-clear description of God's personal attendants or the seraphim as they are usually called—though it is not a clear description. We might say that any lack of clarity comes from a human trying to describe the supra-human things that he saw. Still, can't you just feel—just SEE—the beauty and the power in his words, in his descriptions?

Each one had six wings, says Isaiah. Each one covered his face with one set, his feet with one set, and flew with the third set of wings. I wonder if these powerful, fiery, magnificent beings were UNABLE to look at God?

It seems that one of the beings is assigned the job of glorifying God verbally, “Holy, holy, HOLY is the LORD of hosts—the whole earth is filled with his glory!” We might call this being the ultimate “yes man” wouldn't you say? When he spoke there was smoke that filled the temple and his voice was so powerful that it shook the foundations of the temple.

When I was a teenager and young adult, one of my friends had a saying—a question that he would ask.

When something happened that was unexpected or that changed the circumstance completely, he would ask, “How you gonna act NOW?” or “NOW how you gonna act?” We'd be messing around and having fun at school—doing something we shouldn't, I'm sure—and someone would look up and see a teacher coming. He'd say, “NOW how you gonna act?”

So we might ask the same thing of Isaiah. Isaiah saw the glory and he heard the voice and he felt the shaking.

“NOW how you gonna act, Isaiah?”

In the moment, in that experience, it seems that Isaiah understood the true nature of God—and when he did, he understood his own true nature. I can imagine him falling on his face as he cried, “woe is me! I am a man of sin and in the presence of almighty God!”

Notice though, that God's reaction to Isaiah is not what Isaiah might have expected. Instead of rejecting Isaiah as worthless—without value—he instead sent one of his attendants to purify Isaiah, using fire.

Of course Isaiah was sinful all over, but in scripture the lips are often seen as showing what is in the heart. As Isaiah's lips were purified, so was his heart and the rest of him, also.

So—Isaiah is purified and he is given a commission and he accepts that commission and he does what God said and the people repent and he lives happily ever after, right?

Well, not quite.

Isaiah did God's work faithfully and he gave the people the word of God, but as often happened with his people—they didn't listen. Isaiah called for religious and social reform but it didn't happen. HE was successful in that he did the work God called him to do but he was hated and hounded and ultimately killed by the people he was sent to serve.

Also it is important to note that in his writings we have the most passages about the coming Christ of any book in the Old Testament.

He was VERY successful, but he was not heard.

When I first studied this passage years ago, it was an effort to shape the worship of my church and set a biblical pattern for what we did on Sundays. AND it works for that.

This passage makes a great pattern for our worship. Continuing to go with that shirt-pattern theme, we might say that “worship” is the main pattern in the package or the shirt itself.

I'm not going to go into great detail as to how I think this works for our worship—but here is the short version.

In our worship we should be:

1. Acknowledging the glory and majesty and power of almighty God.
2. Remembering our place before one so holy. The mightiest beings we can imagine covered their faces and their feet before God.
3. Offering praise and worship—not in a meek and mild and pitiful way, but in the power of the Spirit of God and with fire and voices that shake the foundations of this place—the foundations of the world.
4. Acknowledging our sinfulness and our separation from God, which has happened by our own hand and through our families and our community and our world.
5. Seeking the forgiveness that can only come from the fire of the altar and the very feet of God.
6. Accepting the commission that God gives us each and every time we are in his presence, saying, “here am I, send me!”

In our pattern-theme, I want to talk about the vest—how this passage may be a great pattern for how we are to see and relate to God in every moment, not just in our worship. Some of the elements will be the same or similar but I want to take this past the worship we do here weekly and take the pattern into our lived and relationship.

The first piece of that vest is seeing God. Isaiah saw God in all his glory. If you and I are going to relate to God, to worship God, and pray to God—we need to first dwell on his nature and his power. His BEING.

Most of you know that there is a place for humor and fun in our worship and in our relationship to God. I think WAY too many Christians are too uptight and most of us need to lighten up A LOT when it comes to our religion.

STILL, when we come to this place—or any place of prayer and worship—when we come to God, we must always remember that God created all of THIS, everything you can see and everything you can hear. All the birds and the stars and the planets and the entire multi-verse (I'm not sure that is a word—but my God created the universe AND MORE.

He IS power.

He IS glory.

He IS holiness.

The mightiest beings we can't even imagine cover their faces and their feet as they bow and worship God! If you and I come to God with even a slight understanding of who he really is, we will fall on our faces at his feet as Isaiah did.

1. In our relationship to God, we must first acknowledge his power and his glory and his person—trembling in awe. Then we can move to the next part of the pattern.
2. The second part of the pattern is connected to the first. Acknowledging where we stand. Not compared to each other or our neighbor—but compared to God.

Scripture tells us that our best and our greatest and our most righteous works and actions are nothing but filthy rags before God.

Let me describe what that means.

I can use a towel to death. When I find a towel that I like—one that is “just right” I will use it to death. It becomes my favorite and I will use it every time it is available. I will literally dry with it for years. Even when it gets thin and faded, I will still (out of habit?) go and get it like it was an old friend. Sooner or later—much later—it will get too thin to absorb much water and I will tear it into squares and use those to wash dishes. Vonna has pretty little embroidered dish cloths but my hands are too big to go into most glasses and I need a nice big cloth to help me get to the bottom. I can use them for that almost forever, but eventually they are not up for that work anymore, I will take them up to my shop and wipe my greasy hands on them and use them to clean parts. When Vonna isn't looking I will wash them in the washer and use them some more.

When we are no longer good for that task, I will drop them in my trash can and take them to the dump.

THAT is our righteousness before God's glory.

You know that it is one of my themes, but it is all too easy for us to forget the standard. It is all too easy for us to look in the pew next to us and look at our neighbors and think that we are AOK—thank you very much.

Even if we are literally religious to a fault, it is not enough.

Once we have seen and acknowledged the power and glory of God and once we have recognized our own failure and uncleanness—as Isaiah did—then we find a third part of the pattern.

3. Confession.

Confession of our sinfulness. Once we have meditated on the Creator of the universe or the multi-verse or mega-verse or whatever we might call all of creation and once we have recognized our own sinfulness using God as a measuring stick—we then confess.

I get the idea that Isaiah's confession was blurted out, that it was nearly automatic. Once he had seen God and had “looked in the mirror,” the “woe is me” seems to have come quite naturally--automatically.

When we come to God in prayer or worship or in relationship, we are to meditate on God's glory and we are to look at ourselves with those same eyes that just saw God and then confess that we fall WAY short. Automatic reaction.

4. The next step in the pattern is also automatic, but it is not our action it is God's action. In our passage, God responded to Isaiah by sending a burning coal to cleanse Isaiah's lips, his heart, his very being.

Of course, for Isaiah the symbol of his sinfulness was his lips. As I indicated earlier, the mouth often shows the condition of the soul. It was also because Isaiah was being commissioned to speak for God.

As you and I meditate on God—acknowledge him for who and what he is—and as we understand where we stand compared to him—and as we confess our sinfulness—then God automatically forgives.

God will cleanse.

God will lift us up.

Then God will commission us.

THEN he will do great things through us and for us—IF—we take the next two steps

5. Step five is to listen. ““Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?””

Oh, we don't want to listen do we? Our western listening skills are so bad that we TEACH listening in several of our classes at work and with the hospitals we partner with. We don't want to listen to our wives or husbands or our friends. Or our employees or even God himself. All we want to do is talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk—did you get tired of hearing that over and over? So does God.

Talking is easy, listening is hard.

Isaiah stood silently before God. He acknowledged the glory of God and confessed his unworthiness. God cleansed his lips and heart. And Isaiah listened.

6. The final step in this pattern is to act on what we have heard. “Here I am. Send me!”

Oooooooo. Scary stuff. Where was Isaiah going and what was he doing? Look back at the passage. God didn't say. Isaiah didn't know.

Right now. Right now, God is seeking to change our lives—yours and mine—for the better. But change is still change and the human animal generally hates change. Change is often painful in some sense. Fear of change keeps us in bad relationships and bad jobs.

Part of the pattern we see in Isaiah is acting on the change God has for us.

How about it?

Did you and I come to do church today or did we come to worship? Is our relationship to God like Isaiah's became or is it shallow and pretty-much-worthless in the end?

I pray that we, as a church and as individuals, will take these patterns to heart. If we will do these things personally and corporately, we will always go from here having worshiped.

Meditate on the power and the glory and the majesty of God. See and acknowledge our sin before God. Accept the forgiveness and cleansing he brings. Listen for his voice. Act on his commission.

More than just worship this works for prayer and it works for a re-dedication of our faith.

It also works for those who don't yet know God in relationship. Have you met God? Have you met him in the ocean or the tornado or in that still small voice? Did the meeting show you who you are before almighty God? Are you willing to acknowledge that sinfulness as Isaiah did? AND are you willing to accept the cleansing God has for you?

When we confess—God is faithful to forgive.

If so, you are welcome. Come up today and we can talk about what all that means.

Christians, you have a general commission. God has sent us out to tell other starving beggars where to find the bread of life.