

Therefore . . . Be Devoted

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

5th in a six-part series

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Isaiah 6:1–8 (CEB)

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne, the edges of his robe filling the temple. ²Winged creatures were stationed around him. Each had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two their feet, and with two they flew about. ³They shouted to each other, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy”
is the LORD of heavenly forces!

All the earth
is filled with God's glory!

⁴The doorframe shook at the sound of their shouting, and the house was filled with smoke.

⁵I said, “Mourn for me; I'm ruined! I'm a man with unclean lips, and I live among a people with unclean lips. Yet I've seen the king, the LORD of heavenly forces!”

⁶Then one of the winged creatures flew to me, holding a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt has departed, and your sin is removed.”

⁸Then I heard the Lord's voice saying, “Whom should I send, and who will go for us?”

I said, “I'm here; send me.”

Luke 4:1–12 (CEB)

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. ²There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. ³The devil said to him, “Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

⁴Jesus replied, “It's written, *People won't live only by bread.*”

⁵Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶The devil said, “I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It's been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. ⁷**Therefore**, if you will worship me, it will all be yours.”

⁸Jesus answered, “It's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*”

⁹The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, “Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here; ¹⁰for it's written: *He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you* ¹¹and *they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*”

¹²Jesus answered, “It's been said, *Don't test the Lord your God.*”

Worshipping together has always been and will continue to be what makes us a church.

Over the course of our lives, we are tested many times. Some tests are inconsequential, though it may not seem that way at the time. Some prove to be crossroads in our lives, shaping all that comes after. This was true even of Jesus.

After his baptism in the Jordan River by his cousin, John the Baptizer, the Holy Spirit led Jesus out to the Judean wilderness to be tested. Was he really ready to take on the vocation given him by his Father? Was he prepared to be Israel's Messiah and to remain faithful to his work, even when it would take him to his death? Would he truly trust his Father in all things?

Now, it may be a bit hard for you to see Jesus in this way, a man genuinely tested in the wilderness. He's God, we say . . . how real could the test be? No way he could ever fail such a test. But this way of thinking is a trap. It robs Jesus of his genuine humanity,

turning him into an actor on a stage playing out his part for the masses. No . . . the test was real, even set up by the Holy Spirit who led him out to the wilderness in the first place. Was Jesus truly ready for what would come?

The test was “administered” by the devil, who is unnamed in Luke’s telling. The devil tempts Jesus three times. The first time Jesus is tempted to feed himself by using his power to turn stones into bread. He refuses, grounding his refusal in the Law of Moses. The third time Jesus is tempted to accept an offer to put God to the test. But, he refuses, knowing his vocation and trusting his Father. But it is the second of the three temptations that is our focus this week. The devil offers to give Jesus authority and power over the earth. Just think of the good Jesus could do. All it would entail is Jesus’ worship of the devil. This seeming shortcut to putting wrongs right must have been attractive. But there can be no shortcut to salvation; Jesus’ path would necessarily be paved with suffering. So, as in the other two temptations, Jesus responds with the Word of God as set forth in Deuteronomy. Jesus will worship only the Lord and will serve only him.

What was true for Jesus is true for us. Kent Hughes writes:

Jesus drew himself up, faced the devil head-on across the wild desolation, and quoted again from Deuteronomy (6:13), where Moses warned his people who were being attracted to idolatry, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’” (v. 8). There was to be no compromise in Jesus’ ministry, no concessions to the power brokers of this world, no seeking improper ease, no idolatry. Again we must cry, all praise to Christ Jesus! We must not fall to the common error of supposing that the temptations that came to Jesus were somehow easy. They were excruciating. Jesus met them as a human totally dependent on the Father, not as a quasi-man.

We do not have to look far to see the application to our own lives. The siren song of popular culture is to avoid pain and take the easy way, the path of least resistance. But God’s Word still speaks truly: “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus embraced the cross by refusing the easy way, and as his followers, he says, we must do the same: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:24, 25).

If we embrace the logic of Jesus’ refusal to take the easy way, we will see that taking the path of least resistance, to follow comfortable expediency, is idolatry—it is worshiping a false God.¹

Rather than embracing the false gods on offer in our world, we devote ourselves to the worship of the one true God, the Lord God. This worship can take many forms but it is our corporate worship that makes us a church. There are other places that we can serve and sing. There are other places we can gather and give. But it is here, on our campus, that we come together to worship our Lord.

Worship of the Lord God Almighty has always been central in the relationship between God and his people. Today’s passage from Isaiah 6 is a good place to start in understanding how and why we worship as we do. The scene in Isaiah 6 above is the heavenly throne room, with God surrounded by the celestial court. In one of his sermons, W. Maynard Pittendreigh, a Presbyterian minister, draws out five principles from this passage that I think you’ll find helpful.

1. “*True worship is not an escape from reality.*” Notice how Isaiah 6 begins with this: “In the year that King Uzziah died, . . .” The death of a king was about the biggest event

¹ Hughes, R. K. (1998). *Luke: that you may know the truth* (pp. 135–136). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

² For example, Luke 2:37, Acts 7:7, Acts 24:14, Philippians 3:3, and Rev 7:15

³ From Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged by G. Bromily)

⁴ One last observation. In the first centuries after Jesus, Christians stopped using the word *proskyneō* for

there could be in an ancient kingdom. This statement is not merely marking the chronology of Isaiah's vision, it reminds us that we are to bring the "real world" into worship with us. The worship of God needs to be integrated into the rest of our life, not separated from it. We can bring it all into worship with us – all the worries, all the anxieties, all the fears – and we might well find that we can leave a large part of it

Making Sense of Isaiah

Few Old Testament books have shaped our Christian faith as has Isaiah. It is a wonderful and eye-opening experience to read Isaiah, but it isn't always easy. Getting the "flow" and the "big picture" are hard. Here are a few keys that will help.

First, Isaiah is most likely the work of two authors. The first 39 chapters date back to the prophet Isaiah himself and are set in the context of Judah as it is being threatened by Assyria in the late eighth-century BC. But chapters 40-66 are the work of a prophet during the time of the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC, Israel's darkest days. Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66 are books within a book. You'll even find them referred to sometimes as First and Second Isaiah. I can virtually guarantee you that if you read the opening verses of Second Isaiah (chapter 40) as words written to a people who had lost everything at the hands of the Babylonians, your heart will be moved.

Second, you will be surprised how much of Isaiah you already know and how much of Christ you will find. Some call it the most Christ-filled book in the OT. George Frideric Handel went to Isaiah 40 to open his glorious oratorio *Messiah*. The chorus, "For Unto Us a Child is born" is from Isaiah 9. When Jesus rose in his hometown of Nazareth to begin his public ministry he asked for the scroll of Isaiah and opened it to chapter 61. He shocked the crowd by announcing that the words were fulfilled in their hearing on that day (see Luke 4). When you come to Isaiah 53, you'll see that it is a summary of Jesus' ministry and his sacrificial death. It isn't hard to imagine a young Jesus finding answers to his purpose and vocation in the words of Isaiah 53.

Third, try to avoid seeing Isaiah as little more than a pile of "predictions." Instead, see it as a collection of word-pictures from God that help us to understand God, ourselves, and God's faithfulness to his promises to renew and restore his creation. It is a large drama that is played out in this prophetic work.

behind when we leave. God can take these burdens from us. God wants to.

2. *"True worship focuses on God."* In his vision, Isaiah sees God sitting on his throne, arrayed in royal garments. It is God who is at the center, not Isaiah. But is this really like our own understanding of worship? Have you ever heard someone say "I wasn't fed today" or "I didn't go to worship this week, I'm just not getting enough out of it." Of course, we do desire to be fed and we do seek transformation in worship . . . BUT . . . worship is about God, not ourselves. God is the "audience." The better question would be, "Did I feed God today?"

3. *"True worship always begins with an awareness of God's holiness."* Yes, we have a friend in Jesus, but God is not our "buddy." The seraphs in Isaiah's vision sing "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts and the whole earth is full of his glory." "Holiness" is the word we use to name God's quintessential nature, distinguishing God from his creation. To the extent that people or places or things are "holy," it is only because God has deemed them to be. We stand in awe of God's holiness. We fall on our knees before God's holiness. When we come to worship God, we may need to remind ourselves that we come to worship the Holy LORD God. Architecture, music, and ritual may serve to help us, but regardless of the place or the time or the circumstances, true worship begins with this awareness of God's holiness.

4. *"True worship helps us to understand our shortcomings and embrace God's forgiveness."* In his vision, Isaiah is overwhelmed by his unworthiness to come before God saying, "Woe is me. I am lost." Isaiah has unclean lips and yet he is beholding God. True worship will help us to embrace that we need to be forgiven, that we need God's grace. Sometimes our worship includes include a Prayer of Confession. It is the

moment when we lift up to God our own awareness of our failures to love God and neighbor. But also remember that when we do so, we include the Assurance of Pardon, the word of forgiveness for a sinful people. One of the seraphs touches Isaiah's unclean lips with a hot coal, burning them clean as it were. The Apostle John put it this way: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

5. "True worship motivates us to roll up our sleeves and get to work." After his lips were touched by the hot coal, Isaiah hears God's voice asking, "Whom shall I send?" Isaiah's response was simple, direct, and ought to be ours as well, "Here I am, send me!" Jesus reminds us that the worshiping of God is bound up with serving God. As we saw, when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, the devil showed him the whole earth promising "All these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me." Jesus replied by quoting from the Hebrew scriptures (Deuteronomy 6:1), "Worship (*proskyneo*) the Lord your God, and serve (*latreou*) only him." (see Matthew 4:1-11) In the New Testament, *latreou* is most often translated "serve," but is translated "worship" more than a dozen times!² Why? Because serving God is worshiping God and worshiping God ought to be our call to service, just as it was Isaiah's.

In the New Testament, *latreou* always denotes service rendered to God, whether it is in a ministry of prayer (e.g., Acts 26:7), missionary work (2 Corinthians 8:18), or simply the service to God rendered by leading a righteous life (see Philippians 3:3).³ This is why you'll sometimes hear Christians say things like "Our mission trip was an act of worship." They are right. We acknowledge God's glory and worth when we serve him. Worship includes our prayers and praise songs, but it is so much more!⁴

Let us worship God!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Reflect upon on and discuss the parallels between Isaiah's vision of God and the worship services in which you've participated, here at St. Andrew and elsewhere. Can you see the tension between worship services that would seem to more directly reflect the sense of Isaiah's vision and those that are simpler, focusing on preaching and the common fellowship. How might we be able to carry these five worship principles into a variety of worship styles?
2. What really makes a worship service a "worship service?" When would a "worship service" stop being "worship" and become merely a "meeting" or a "class?" These are not easy questions and Christians certainly don't agree. If you compare a Greek Orthodox service with a Quaker meeting, you'll quickly see the tensions and differing perspectives. Do you see in Methodist worship services an effort to hold these two poles together, creating a place where Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists can meet not only in a common theology but in an approach to worship that is somewhat familiar to both? How well do you think we do at finding the middle way?
3. How does our corporate worship prepare us to work the works of the kingdom, to get out there and truly worship him whom we worship? How could our present worship practices be changes to better prepare us for God's service?

² For example, Luke 2:37, Acts 7:7, Acts 24:14, Philippians 3:3, and Rev 7:15

³ From Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged by G. Bromily)

⁴ One last observation. In the first centuries after Jesus, Christians stopped using the word *proskyneo* for worship because it was also used by pagans in reference to the worship of their gods. Instead, when referring to their own worshiping of the one true God, Christians used only the Greek word for serving, *latreou*.

Weekly Prayer List

During the week, jot down the names of people who need your prayers.
Such prayers bind you to them in the presence of God.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Monday, Genesis 8:20-22 Noah worships	Tuesday, Leviticus 16 The ritual of the Day of Atonement when sacrifice was made for the sins of Israel
Wednesday, Micah 6:6-8 What does God require of us?	Thursday, John 4:19-26 Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman about worship.
Friday, Acts 2:42-47 Life and worship in the first Christian community	Saturday, 1 Corinthians 14 Some of Paul's instruction re the conduct of worship. What lessons could you draw from this?

