

October 6, 2019

Called  
God Calls Isaiah  
Isaiah 6:1-8

**Opening words:** This is the definition of called: (according to CRU, formally Campus Crusade for Christ) Calling, is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service. That definition reminds me of my calling. Personally, I have never questioned my calling. It is my greatest resource. I am both humbled and proud that God called me, with my unique combination of strengths and weaknesses. My calling is a big part of my personal identity. Daily, I am reminded I am paid by this congregation and serve within the United Methodist system, but I work for God. Let me say this clearly. You don't want a minister who hasn't been called.

In this sermon series we are looking at Old Testament characters who God called. We began by looking at Abraham's call. In his story we talked about purpose. Then, we looked at Samuel's call. In his story we talked about positioning ourselves to hear God. Last week, we look at Jonah's call, "The Reluctant Prophet." In his story we found the themes of faithfulness and evangelism. Next week, we will look at Moses's calling. The theme is God hearing our prayers. Today, we look at Isaiah's calling. The theme is making yourself available to God. Our scripture reading for today is Isaiah 6:1-8. Let me call the message *God Calls Isaiah*.

**Isaiah 6:1-8** In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a very high and wonderful throne. His long robe filled the Temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraph angels stood around him. Each angel had six wings. They used two wings to cover their faces, two wings to cover their bodies, and two wings to fly. <sup>3</sup> The angels were calling to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD All-Powerful. His Glory fills the whole earth." <sup>4</sup> The sound was so loud that it caused the frame around the door to shake, and the Temple was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> I was frightened and said, "Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure enough to speak to God, and I live among people who are not pure enough to speak to him. But I have seen the King, the LORD All-Powerful." <sup>6</sup> There was a fire on the altar. One of the Seraph angels used a pair of tongs to take a hot coal from the fire. Then the angel flew to me with it in his hand. <sup>7</sup> Then he touched my mouth with the hot coal and said, "When this hot coal touched your lips, your guilt was taken away, and your sins were erased." <sup>8</sup> Then I heard the Lord's voice, saying, "Who can I send? Who will go for us?" So I said, "Here I am. Send me!"

There is an old preaching story I heard years ago. An elderly woman lived alone in her apartment. Still wanting to serve God, she prayed for some insight. The next day, she realized she could bring happiness to others by playing her piano. She placed this small

ad in the Oakland Tribune: "Pianist will play hymns by phone daily for those who are sick and despondent--the service is free." The notice included the number to dial. When people called, she would ask, "What hymn would you like to hear?" Within a few months her playing had brought cheer to several hundred people. Many of them freely poured out their hearts to her, and she was able to help and encourage them.

Her story reminds me of this old quote, *"God does not ask about our ability or inability, but our availability."* "I can't disagree with that quote. As a matter of fact, I have seen that quote lived out many times. If you find some truth in that quote say, **"Amen!"**

We are instructed today from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. The name Isaiah means "The Lord Saves." He is one of the Major Prophets. His book is sixty-six chapters long. Isaiah began his ministry about the year 740 B.C., which makes him a contemporary of Amos, Hosea and Micah. He lived in politically stormy times. The Assyrian Empire was expanding; Israel was declining. Maybe that is why the people are hungry for God. People always look for God when life is hard. The major themes of this book are judgment and salvation.

Our scripture reading for today is a vision. In the vision, Isaiah has a trip into the temple of God. Everything about the temple is impressive. God is seated high and exalted, with a long flowing robe which fills the entire temple. Heavenly creatures are flying around. They are proclaiming the holiness of God. Their message is so powerful the temple shakes and is consumed by smoke. Yet, hiding in some corner of this impressive temple is an insignificant man, Isaiah. He feels out of place. In comparison to God, he is nothing. In comparison to God, his sins are obvious. He thinks he is well hidden but the Almighty sees all. In the end, God saves Isaiah from his sinfulness. One of the flying creatures approaches him with a hot coal, placing it on his lips. The man, Isaiah, is a changed man, atoned and guilt free. Humbled by this experience, Isaiah has no other option, so he spends the rest of his life serving God.

The calling of Isaiah is one of the greatest pieces of scriptures in the Bible. I have preached on it several times. However, this time one theme really stuck out. Look at the scripture with me one more time. The scripture doesn't say Isaiah changed in any tangible way. The scripture doesn't say Isaiah got taller. The scripture does not say Isaiah's IQ score jumped. The scripture does not say he got better at mathematics. The scripture does not say he was given miraculous powers or suddenly had the ability to fly. Isaiah didn't change in any tangible way, but Isaiah did change. The only thing that changed about Isaiah was his availability. After experiencing God, he became available to God. It sounds like nothing, but it really is something. How available are you making yourself to God? Making yourself available to God is very important in the Christian faith. It has been that way from the very beginning.

The disciples were not exceptional when Jesus called them. Not a single disciple was educated or well connected. Each one had their own flaw. You can say Simon Peter was

emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, placed personal interest above the group. Thomas demonstrated a questioning attitude that undermined morale. As a tax collector, Matthew had a questionable past. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus had radical leanings, and both could have been manic-depressive. Even the greatest missionary the church has ever known, the Apostle Paul came with baggage. They make the point that God is not interested in our abilities or our inabilities, but that God is interested only in our availability. If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**" This is the question you must answer today.

How do you make yourself available to God? There is no single answer. The answer is found in the balance of these four things. Consider these four things with me:

If you want to be available to God's service, then **be faithful**. If you are not faithful to God, then you are probably not going to be available to God. If you have ever read the Bible, then you know faithfulness is important. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats. The sheep are told they are going to heaven because they had been living the Gospel. They had been visiting the incarcerated. They had been feeding the hungry. They had been clothing the needy. In verse 21 of that chapter, Jesus says to the sheep, "Well done, good and faithful servant." If you want to be available to God's service, then be faithful.

If you want to be available to God's service, then **be teachable**. I do not want to shock you, but you don't know everything. Everybody has something to learn. It has been said learning takes three stages. The first stage is learning the right answers. The second stage is learning the right questions. The third stage is learning what questions are worth asking. What do you think God is trying to teach you today? If you want to be available to God's service, then be faithful and teachable.

If you want to be available to God's service, then **be flexible**. This is one of those things time has taught me. God is different from us in many ways. One of those ways is the way we view time and money. We are far more preoccupied with schedules and budgets, than God. Sometimes the greatest ministry moments happen in the most inconvenient times. Jesus understood that divine truth. Jesus was interrupted all the time. Jesus was interrupted while speaking to a great crowd. Jesus was interrupted in sleep. Jesus was interrupted in prayer. Jesus interrupted while healing someone. Jesus was even interrupted while traveling. Jesus was interrupted many times, but Jesus never cared, because he saw those interruptions as an opportunity to minister. Do interruptions bother you? If you want to be available to God, then be faithful, teachable and flexible.

If you want to be available to God's service, then **be humble**. Humility does not mean you lack skills or self-worth. Humility means you are using your skills and self-worth to God's glory. The great missionary to China Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) understood

humility. He was scheduled to speak at a large Presbyterian church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator of the service introduced the missionary in eloquent and glowing terms. He told the large congregation all that Taylor had accomplished, and then presented him as *"our illustrious guest."* Taylor stood quietly for a moment, and then opened his message by saying, *"Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master."* If you want to be available to God's service, then be faithful, teachable, flexible and humble.

God is not interested in our abilities and our inabilities God is only interested in our availability. If you make yourself available to God, who knows what will happen. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

When Kathryn and I return to Estonia next summer, it will be her twenty-seventh trip to the former Soviet Union. I have been to Eastern Europe about twenty times, but who is counting? We have traveled to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Estonia. The trips have always been a balance of building maintenance and children. When I think of the people who have traveled with us through the years, they have very little in common. They all had different skills and interests. However, they all had a passion for people and made themselves available to God. The oldest person to go was a man in his eighties.

The youngest person to go was a fourteen-year-old boy, Colin, from Wooster, Ohio. He was a big strong good-looking young man. He traveled with his father. They made and sold caramel corn to fund their trip. When I told someone we were taking a fourteen-year-old boy to Saint Petersburg, Russia on a mission trip someone scoffed. They asked, "Why are you taking a kid on the trip? He is wet behind the ears and he has no skills. I bet he is a picky eater and he will get homesick." That negative person was wrong. When I look back on that trip, I remember Colin being one of the most valuable members on that team. Do you know what made Colin so valuable? He was a fourteen-year-old young man, who was strong and good looking. I liked Collin, but the fourteen-year-old girls from the orphanage found him fascinating. Colin was our passport into the social circles of that orphanage. Because of Colin, we had instant creditability. Because of Colin, we had a special connection with those orphans, who we came to help. Colin was a gifted young man with a good heart, but that didn't really matter. The only thing that really mattered was that Colin made himself available and God did the rest. So this is my question for you.

How available are you to God's service? Do you remember that opening quote? It said, *"God does not ask about our ability or inability, but our availability."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"** How available are you to God's service?