

WORSHIP THAT COMES WITH A WARNING LABEL

**Holy Smoke**

Isaiah 6:1-18

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**LISTEN:** <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/worship-that-comes-with-a-warning-label-holy-smoke/>

What motivates organizations to change? Usually, it's a sense of failure, the crumbling of what is. Isaiah was going through just that. Uzziah had been king of Judah for 40 years, the only king Isaiah had ever known. Isaiah and the people sensed this great disorientation and anxiety about the future. But as we was grieving the death of a king, he had a vision of **the** King! You see, change doesn't really come to our hearts, our church or our world when we gather new facts; it comes when we have a new vision, a new beauty. A vision of God most Holy.

And Isaiah learned during this worship experience something we must also learn. Times of national disorientation and confusion are not times for God's people to wring our hands; these treacherous times are actually perfect evangelistic opportunities. An opening for us. Or, to use our imagery, when we are in choppy waters or have lost our compass heading, that is not the time to jump overboard. It's the time to reset your compass heading and to hoist your sails. That's why worship must be practiced with intentionality.

Angels showed up in this worship experience (v. 2) and they chanted, probably in an antiphonal way: holy, holy, holy (v. 3). Holiness is first of all about God's "otherness." He is not like us, not an extension of our wish fulfillment. As someone said, the universe depends on God but God does not depend on the universe (or on us)--except that God loves us and longs for a relationship with us. This is a good time to remind us that worship is not about us; it's about God. The question is not, "Did I get anything out of worship?" but "Did God?"

As the chanting came to a crescendo, the pillars shook, smoke was everywhere. Have you ever had a holy moment like this? Worship experiences which just come over you? I had one once. I was in the backyard of our farm home, near the clothes line, on a beautiful summer evening. I can't even begin to describe the beauty of it.

My guess is that Isaiah was a bit blindsided, taken off guard. Maybe like some of us, he thought that worship exists so we can manage God. No. In true worship, we are not in charge. Worship needs to come with a warning label. Maybe we should issue asbestos suits before worship. As Annie Dillard writes, the ushers should issue life preservers and lash us to our pews.

As it dawns on Isaiah that this is not your ordinary worship, he says, "Woe is me. I'm toast." (v. 5). But he forgot about grace and mercy. He forgot that "God is different from us but not distant from us" [Page Kelley, in *Broadman Commentary on the Bible*, Vol. 5, p. 210]. One of the angels touched his lips with a burning coal. There is no painless cure for sin. Suffering and death, the Cross, all factor into true worship. The flow of worship is also the path toward

salvation: a vision of God, repentance, confession, cleansing and pardon (vv. 6-7). Pronounced clean! I'll never forget that little boy at church camp, who told me after a worship service, "I just feel all washed out on the inside!" Yes! That's it!

Are you following this drama so far? There was the vision of God, the vision of self and now, the vision of a hurting world, "Who will go for us?" (v. 8). Mark it down. A worship experience that doesn't result in mission to others is a sham. Many scholars believe that the plural "us" in v. 8 is a reference to the divine council in God's court. Here's a thought. What if Isaiah is afraid that one of the angels in the council will volunteer? And like a third grader, wanting to be chosen to lead the lunch line today, he is holding up his hand, "Pick me, God, I want to go!"

And yet, Isaiah knew the task before him looked impossible. So he placed his life completely in God's hands. That's worship. We also see an impossible task. Good. That means we will depend upon God. We set our sails but God provides the wind, the Spirit. What if, the next few months, 200, 300, 400 of us became more intentional about life-changing worship? Every day in personal worship and every week in corporate worship, we became intent on placing our lives in God's hands? Hoisting our sails?