



The stories of the great heroes and heroines of the Bible inspire and instruct us in our own lives. Each one has a “who knows?” moment when God’s story seems to break into regular, everyday life—a critical moment offering a sense of calling or purpose. It’s as true for us as it was in ancient days. Who knows? Maybe God has plans to use you for His glory. Who knows? Maybe God put you where you are, with the influence you have, for a reason. Who knows? Maybe the things you suffer today will make sense in time. When God shows up, a sense of mysterious discovery enters our lives. Who knows what God has planned?

WHO KNOWS? • ISAIAH 6:1-8 • Tim McConnell • May 27, 2018

I've been thinking about taking one of those DNA tests. I love the commercials. There's the one about the guy who thought he was Scottish his whole life and wore kilts and everything, but then found out he was German—he had to go buy lederhosen. There's a beautiful olive-complexioned girl jumping in frozen lakes; she found out she's 3% Swedish. I have a friend named Ruben who's Latino but found out he is 10% Native American and 4% African. He said it just changed the way he saw himself. But, he told me, his friend in church took it and found out her dad was not her dad. Her neighbor was. Which explained how nice he was to her growing up. We might laugh, but it wasn't funny to her. Or you have stories of people getting arrested for past crimes after submitting DNA. I don't have any skeletons like that in my closet...I don't think. My favorite is the commercial about a woman who found out she is the direct descendant of an African tribal queen. She says, if that's in my blood, if I belong to you, I can do this! And she walks confidently into a business meeting. I like that. We need to know our stories. We gain strength from our stories.

A few years ago, research revealed that knowing your family story is critical to your emotional health. A research team at Emory University developed a twenty-question "Do You Know?" quiz. Do you know where your grandparents grew up? Do you know where your mom and dad went to high school? Where your parents met? When your family hit hard times? They quizzed a large sample of children. After they finished, September 11th happened. It was terrible, but suddenly the whole research sample of kids had suffered the same trauma at the same time. They measured how the kids all handled it and came up with this result: the single best predictor of children's emotional health, resilience and happiness was knowing their family story. It's graduation season. It's time to read *Oh the Places You'll Go*, "Congratulations! Today is your day. You're off to Great Places! You're off and away! You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose." It's a season of new beginnings. But before it slips by, it's also time to tell stories.

Today we close out our series, *Who Knows?* God is in my story; my story is in God. Over and again we see how God moves into people's stories. We see how people find themselves part of God's great story. Finally, today, I want to make very clear one thing, and we'll do it by looking at the prophet Isaiah. I want you to understand one thing that may be the most important message, the most critical message, for your emotional health, for your very life, that you'll ever hear. There is one thing that we must know. It is this: Jesus is God writing Himself into the

story—into the story of the world itself, into our human story, and into your story. If you believe and trust in Him.

The story of Isaiah we just read is an intensely personal spiritual experience. You almost forget that Isaiah is a man just like you and me. If he were here, he would be sitting in one of these chairs just like you. Not ten feet tall. Probably shorter than you! Just a normal guy. But this is no normal moment. This is the moment Isaiah came to know the Lord. If you've never read this before, mark this page, this is one of the most famous moments of someone coming to know God in the whole Bible. It's a vision: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). I saw the Lord. God is there. Have you come to a realization of God? People sometimes say it like Isaiah, but sometimes they say things like "I just knew God was there." "I had a sense of the presence of God, like when you know a friend is standing behind you before you turn around." I knew God was there. Isaiah knows the presence of God.

But more than that, Isaiah saw a little bit about who God is: "Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke" (Isaiah 6:2-4). God had servants around Him, "seraphim"—some kind of angel. The seraphim covered their faces. They covered their feet. Feet are not the most attractive part of the body. You might love your feet, but most people prefer to keep them covered up. These creatures, you see, who serve God unflinchingly, who serve God in perfect obedience, even these sinless creatures, when in the presence of the holy God, they cover their eyes. "God, You are too Holy for me to look at." They cover their feet, "God, You are too Holy too look at my imperfections." And they cry out "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty!" They give Him the triple holy. In Hebrew you don't often use adjectives, instead you double the word. It's not so different. You might comment on Instagram about a pic—he's not just cute, he's "cute, cute, cuu-ute!" The angels declare the holiness of God three times. Holy. Holy. Holy. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we can say with New Testament knowledge. The glory fills the temple; it fills the whole earth; it shakes the foundations. Isaiah is in the presence of God.

Immediately, he hits his knees. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!" (Isaiah 6:5). Woe to

me! This is not some sanctimonious moment. This is Isaiah having much the same reaction you or I would have finding ourselves in the presence of the Lord. "Oh, crud!" Isaiah assumes that what he is seeing right now is going to be the last thing he sees. God had said to Moses, "no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). What Isaiah is thinking here is that he is a sinner. I'm a sinner in a sinful world; I'm no different. When the light of the presence of God shines on you, suddenly all the things you were hiding, the parts you were covering up, they are all on display. You are made. Your cover is blown. Your whitest whites don't seem so white next to that. Your stains are all on display. What Isaiah is thinking is what we should all be thinking, me and my imperfections, my sins, my crimes against what is right, they don't belong in the presence of a holy, holy, holy God. It would make perfect sense that my destruction comes next. I'm suddenly like shadow in front of light, like cold in front of heat—I'm done! Peter had the same experience when he saw the face of Jesus in his boat and knew the presence of God, "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man'" (Luke 5:8). Sinner versus holy God. Isaiah hits his knees in a spirit of confession.

But watch what happens next. "Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for'" (Isaiah 6:6-7). I wish I had a whole sermon for these two verses. Lean in. I want to show you a number of things really fast. This is forgiveness. This is redemption. This is God expressing His heart of love. A few things: (1) Forgiveness comes from God to Isaiah. God brings atonement to us. Everything in us wants to make up for our sins. Everything in us wants to justify ourselves. Everything in us wants to make a sacrifice to please God, to appease God, to make up for our wrongs and in fact to obligate God or "the gods" or "the universe" to return favor to us. You can't offer or work or behave your way out of what you have done, but God can forgive you. It's God who comes to us with forgiveness, not us who go to God with justification. (2) The live coal comes from the altar. An altar is where a sacrifice is made. It is where sacrificial flesh and blood are consumed by fire and lifted to the heavens. It isn't that there was no sacrifice, it is that the sacrifice was not made by us. (3) It's intimate. It touches the lips. It is as intimate and vulnerable as a kiss. This is God's love. (4) "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for," says the angel. I want to ask you today, on what grounds? How can this perfect servant of God say to Isaiah or to you or to me or to anyone, "your sin is atoned"? He can say it because God already sees the

perfect sacrifice of His Son Jesus on the cross. It isn't that there is no sacrifice; it's that the sacrifice wasn't made by you. It was made by Jesus. A sacrifice has been made to make up for, to atone for, your sin. Your sin is not a mistake or a misunderstanding or a lesser choice—your sin is a crime. Don't confess your bad feelings to God, confess your crimes. "Lord, best as I can see, subject to Your conviction by Your Holy Spirit and Your Word, I confess the following crimes. I did this, I did that. I broke Your Holy law." But the angel says, your sin has been atoned—someone paid the price. So your guilt is taken away. Taken away. Don't walk around in the shame and guilt. When God forgives sins the guilt is taken away. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). Memorize that. Read that whole Psalm. Your guilt is removed; it's gone. (5) Lastly, can I just emphasize what the seraphim tells Isaiah to do? What's the word it says? "See." See that this has touched your lips. See that your sins have been atoned for. See that you are forgiven. See that your guilt is taken away. Can you see it? Do you know it?

Finally, Isaiah is commissioned. We are not only saved from; we are saved for. Isaiah is not only saved from his sins, he is saved for God's mission. "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me'" (Isaiah 6:8). That's not a prideful moment. He's speaking as a servant there. Isaiah has a mission. I don't know if you know this, but that's the shape of every worship service we have here at First Pres. We gather realizing the presence of God in worship, we hit our knees before His holiness in humble confession, we receive forgiveness because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we receive God's Word, and we go out on God's mission. That's it. That's what we are doing, that's what we are rehearsing every time we gather. Those are the dance steps we learn in the wedding banquet of our King.

Well, the message God gave Isaiah was profound. More than any other prophet, more than any other person, God gave Isaiah a vision of the coming Jesus. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Then the crucifixion: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Even the resurrection, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). Isaiah didn't know fully what he foresaw, but the whole plan of

salvation was written out under his pen. Do you know what it was? God in Jesus was writing Himself into our story, to rescue us from our own destruction.

Dorothy Sayers wrote a detective series about a character she called Lord Peter Wimsey. About halfway through the series, a woman shows up named Harriet Vane who everyone immediately recognized as a thinly-veiled portrait of herself. Harriet was a detective novelist, one of the first women to get an Oxford degree—everybody knows it was Dorothy Sayers herself. Now, the main character Peter was miserable, lonely and self-destructive, but Harriet changes all that when they fall in love. Sayers wrote herself into the series to save her dear Peter from self-destruction! That's like what God has done. People have argued whether Rembrandt subtly painted himself into his works. Alfred Hitchcock appears in all his films. Now Stan Lee, the Marvel Comics genius, cameos in every movie about one of his Marvel characters. That's all fun. But Harriet saved Peter.

God is in my story. Jesus is God writing Himself into our story. Our story had gone desperately wrong. We were headed for destruction of our own making. But God wrote Himself into our story in Jesus. Unto us a child is born. A Son is given. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Isaiah saw, God was not going to leave us to run our stories into our own death and dead end. God was coming to save. What was true for one is true for all. What is true for all is true for one—true for you. Jesus is God writing Himself into your story. Jesus came. Jesus died on the cross because your story was leading to death. He took your death upon Himself. Then He rose again, so you could follow Him into eternal life. Your story doesn't have to end with death. It can end in the eternal life Jesus died to gain for you.

Maybe you know that already. Today is a day to celebrate it. God is in my story. Or maybe you have never heard it that way. Let me tell you something, Jesus is God writing Himself into your story—right now. Jesus isn't a dead figure of the past; Jesus is a living Savior, present right now. You are in the presence of God, just like Isaiah. If you feel the presence of God today, that is not something we know how to simulate or artificially construct—it's God. Let me encourage you. Go to your knees. Ask for forgiveness. Receive God's love. And know that your story belongs to Him. Let's pray together right now... *Almighty God, thank You that You do not leave us behind, thank You that You sent Your Son Jesus into my story, forgive my sins; receive my soul, help me to know and follow You, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

STUDY GUIDE

WHO KNOWS? • ISAIAH 6:1-8

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read the passage for the week: Isaiah 6:1-8. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note words or phrases that seem meaningful. Pray for your study of God's Word.

- When Isaiah initially saw the Lord, what do you think was going through his mind?
- If you were Isaiah in that situation, what would you have done?
- Re-read verses 6-7. How does God's redeeming love meet Isaiah in this moment? What effect does this seem to have on Isaiah?
- When was a time in your life that God's love became really real to you? What do you remember about that experience?
- Have you ever doubted God's ability to use you? What caused you to question God's ability to use you? Remember, who knows what is possible when the redeeming love of Jesus gets a hold on you!

Going Deeper: What does this particular passage show you about the broad sweep of God's kingdom story? What do we learn about who God is?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

How can you share God's love with those around you? What are ways you could serve or bless those around you this week?

IN: Connect With the Family of God

What stood out to you from our sermon series: Who Knows? What do you feel the Lord saying to you about your story? Share your insights with someone this week.