

5/26/2024

Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 6:1-8

In 2014, the movie, "Heaven is For Real" was released and was a hit among Christians. The movie tells what Colton Burpo, a child at the time, experienced on an operating table. Colton says that he was taken into Heaven, sat on Jesus' lap, saw his grandfather whom he'd never met, a sister that died years earlier in the womb, and this was an extremely touching, powerful, profound thing for his parents and millions of Christians to hear- but is it true? Was he really taken to heaven, or was it a nice dream? Throughout the years, I've had several people (not here) tell me similar accounts of experiences with the divine: Jesus or an angel appearing to them in a dream or an out of body experience or even in the middle of the day while they were working in their backyard- and my first response is neither belief nor disbelief, but to ask this question: "How did you feel? How did you feel when you were in the presence of the divine?" And most often, like Colton Burpo, they remember feelings of peace, serenity, light, warmth, comfort, and warmth. When I hear that, I think to myself, "I'm sorry, but this likely wasn't the real thing." Because when you actually look in the Bible, there are many examples of people encountering the divine, and without exception, the feeling they have is always dread, terror, and some version of "I'm going to die." Today, we are going to see one of the greatest examples of this, one of the most powerful, richest, most glorious parts of the entire Bible- through Isaiah's eyes- **A Real Encounter With The Triune God.**" And we are going to see that a real encounter always **1. Humbles You**, and **2. Empowers you.**

1. Humbles You. Isaiah tells us the specific year that he wrote this- the year that King Uzziah died, 740 BC- to firstly show he's not some lunatic. He, of sound mind and body, saw what he saw. He also says this to give you the spiritual state of his people at that time. King Uzziah was an excellent king- many of Judah's kings were corrupt, greedy, unfaithful cowards, but not Uzziah. He was strong, powerful, wise, and took God's Word seriously, until his accomplishments got to his head and he attempted to light incense in the temple in Jerusalem- something God strictly forbid- only the priests were allowed to do that. And when the priests told him, he became angry and defiant, and immediately God struck him with leprosy, and he died shortly after. And everyone knew. Not only was this year the end of a great era for God's people, but the end of the era was bad enough that it made the era seem not that great. Isaiah and his people were left disillusioned and disappointed, asking "Is God actually in control?". And as Isaiah in a vision is taken into the temple, not just the temple in Jerusalem where God's presence was, but the ultimate temple- Heaven itself and sees God in control, on his throne- he is ruling all things, high and exalted, unapproachable, all powerful, bright and glorious- the train of his robe fills the throne room- you see, in the ancient world, kings would have these long robes to signify that they don't have to do any moving, not even lift a finger- they speak and it's done- so their robes are so long they can't really move around- they don't have to. God's robe fills the room because by the power of his word the entire universe is held together.

And who is there? Seraphs, or Seraphim, literally, that means “burning ones,” angels each with six wings, two covering their eyes because they cannot look directly at the glory and beauty and brightness of God, and two wings to cover their feet because they don’t want God to see the “shameful” parts, and two wings flying, ready to go at God’s command- even the angels dare not look directly at God in his glory, and what are they doing? They’re proclaiming his glory and power and might in song: Holy Holy Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is filled with his glory! Holy means perfect, set apart, different, on a different level than everything and everyone else. And the repetition- three times, he is not just holy, or holier, he is holiest- thrice holy- so holy we perfect angels dare not look directly at him. And their song is so vigorous, so passionate, so powerful, the temple shakes from the force of their voices. And smoke fills the room- smoke typically means the presence of God in the Old Testament. Does that seem peaceful, calm, or serene to you? Isaiah doesn’t think so either. He is so terrified and overwhelmed he wants to die- “Woe is me! I am ruined- undone, unraveled, non-existent.” Isaiah feels that he can no longer exist- why? He has unclean lips, and his people have unclean lips. Fascinating. Why does he say it like that? Remember, Isaiah was a prophet- a preacher, a teacher of God’s Word. Evidently, as we see from Isaiah’s prophecies, he is a gifted, gifted preacher and teacher- he knows how to write with beauty, power, elegance- some of the most beautiful words in the Bible come from Isaiah’s pen and lips- but before the glory of God that which is he is most proud of is unclean, and the same is true for those like him- why? Because he has seen something he should not have seen- a holy God in his glory- and his holiness has shown Isaiah just how depraved, corrupt, filthy, sinful, and depraved he really is, and realizes the truth- he deserves to die.

The difference between us and Isaiah is not that Isaiah is more dramatic than we are, but that he sees more clearly than we do, and I want you to ask yourselves- if you were in the throneroom of God surrounded by Seraphim, what is it about you that would make you cover your eyes and ears and lay down in the fetal position like Isaiah? Some of you work with your hands, and you’re proud of your calluses and muscular, hardened hands from years of physical work- but in the throneroom of God you’d be forced to confess that you have filthy, dirty, sinful hands that have selfishly served your desires and have broken God’s holy laws. Maybe you pride yourself on being smart, wise, thoughtful, nuanced, sophisticated, your mind, eyes and ears are your pride. In the throneroom of God we’d immediately be forced to admit the perverted, shameful things we’ve allowed our eyes to see and our ears to hear, and the twisted, evil, selfish thoughts and fantasies that we have in our minds. Maybe you pride yourself on your heart, you’re a good person, you’re thoughtful, kind, generous, and tolerant. Maybe so, but in the throneroom of God, you’d be forced to see how selfish you really are, how often you’ve only shown kindness for yourself, not for others, you’d be forced to see the things about yourself that you try to forget. How do you know you’ve truly encountered the Triune God? When you’ve been humbled to the point where you know you deserve death for your evil.

2. Empowers you. But that’s not all an encounter with the Triune God does. Look at what happens to Isaiah. A seraph- a burning, bright, glorious angel flies directly toward him, to what- destroy him? Smite him? Kick him out? He should! But he doesn’t. He has a live coal- used to burn sacrifices for sin, and

touches Isaiah's mouth with it and whispers. "Look! Your guilt is taken away, your sin is covered." He doesn't say, "Oh, Isaiah, you're being dramatic- it's not that bad." No! His sin is real! His guilt is real! The death and destruction that he knows he deserves is real! But so is the sacrifice. You see, in the temple, in order to be cleansed, enabled to approach a holy, clean, perfect God, something had to die in your place, and God would accept the death of the sacrifice in your place. And chapters later, Isaiah himself comforts all his people and points them to the ultimate sacrifice- There is going to be a perfect servant of God, who is holy like God because he is God, the sitting on the throne with Seraphs declaring his holiness, and he is going to be pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that deserved is going to go on him and give us eternal peace, and by his wounds, we are going to be healed. And as Jesus Christ suffered, he covered our sin, so that Isaiah along with all of us can stand in the presence of God- clean. Holy. Empowered. Everything changes, and now God speaks: "Who will I send?" "Who will go for us?" And who but Isaiah jumps at the opportunity and says, "Look at me! Send me!" How? How can Isaiah say one moment, "woe is me, I'm ruined" and then call for the attention of that holy God and say, "send me!" That's the difference forgiveness makes. God's forgiveness turns fear into joy- I don't *have* to praise and serve this holy God, I *get* to and I desperately *want* to and to do so gives me unthinkable joy. My friends, I don't know what that seraph would have to touch in order for you to know you're forgiven, your eyes, ears, mouth, hands, mind, or heart. But you have been forgiven, your guilt is away, sin is covered, and you have been empowered to serve God with joy.

One of the ways we serve God is by joining the song of the Seraphim and praising God as a Triune God. What do I mean by that? Do you notice anything peculiar about Isaiah's experience? God is proclaimed not simply as "holy," but "holy, holy, holy." And God explicitly says, "who shall go for *us*." The scriptures are completely and utterly clear: God is one. There is one God- not two or three or however many. Yet, as we many times throughout the Old Testament, there is a plurality to God, a "three-ness" to God, and places where God seems to speak to himself, either in Psalm 2 where God says, "You are my Son, today I've begotten you," or last week, we talked about the "Spirit" of God. In the New Testament, like we see today, we see that Jesus is the Son, holy, perfect, God. The Father is holy, perfect, God. The Holy Spirit, he, not it, is holy, perfect, powerful, praised as God. But there's only one God! Early on in Christian history, Christians read the Scriptures and realized that the very essence of God is something we can't completely comprehend or understand, but we can communicate what the Scriptures tell us: God is one, and yet there are three distinguishable, separate persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all of which are God, but not three gods, one God. And if that seems to not quite fit together logically, it's because it doesn't- but in an effort to simply believe and teach what the Bible says, early Christians came up with a name that describes God the way the Bible does: "Triune- three in one" or "trinity." In a few moments, we'll be looking at an ancient document written by Christians that declares something somewhat shocking, yet absolutely true: Whoever does not confess and believe God is triune cannot be saved. Wow! That seems harsh! It is, but it's true. Why? Not because there is a doctrine test at the entrance to Heaven and you have to get these questions correctly, but because throughout history, people have denied that God is triune- either saying that God is one and goes into Father mode, Son mode, spirit mode, or that Jesus and the Holy Spirit aren't really as much

God as the Father. Why is that so bad? Because to deny the Trinity isn't just to have a theological difference or different view, it is to stand at the throne of God and say "you can't be what you say you are. Unless you make sense to me and my mind you aren't really real." To deny that God is triune is to have a god that fits within the tiny logical box that is your brain, and if your god is small enough to completely understand, he isn't big enough to be worshiped. When we confess the Trinity, we are joyfully celebrating that our God is so big, so wonderful, so profound, so beautiful, so holy that we can't fully comprehend him- and yet he loves us, willingly suffered and died for us, brings us into his throne room to reign alongside him as join the angels praising his name. That's what we celebrate today. Amen.