

In Partnership

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Date: 16 September 2012

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[0 : 00] I'd like to think about this one or two aspects of this passage tonight. It's a really deep kind of passage.

I'm just going to bring out one or two things from it. And what I hope to do is give the kind of main, heading main points on the screens just to help you.

And if you're taking notes, that might help you as well. I had one or two requests to do this. And it might be easier to do that than just have the notes on the bulletin sheet.

They have been in the past. So it's really looking again at our identity as Christians, and this time looking at our identity in partnership with God, who calls us to serve Him last week.

We looked at prayer. The threefold word that we use, threefold phrase that we use, the significance and the importance of an honest, open, trusting relationship, and how that marks our identity as Christians, that we have this ongoing, open and honest and trusting relationship with God.

[1 : 16] And we recognise Christ as our Lord, and we recognise Him as our King, as Christians, our Lord, our Jehovah, our Yahweh, our Saviour, King.

Now in 1 Thessalonians, you might want to look up this also. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 12.

We have these words. 1 Thessalonians 2 and verse 12.

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and His glory.

So we have there a New Testament emphasis of our calling. We're called into His kingdom, we're called into His being into a relationship with Him, a relationship of glory with Him, and we are to live lives therefore as those who are worthy.

[2 : 26] We're to live worthy lives as believers, and we're to walk worthy for you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with own children, encouraging, comforting, urging you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory.

And that's really what I would like to think about this evening, as we think about our calling. And what I'm focusing on is our calling to walk worthy, to what every one of us is calling to walk worthy as believers.

And that comes first of all from a good understanding of God, doesn't it? That's the core to enable us to live our lives in a way that is worthy of the living God, when we understand Him.

We've seen and we saw this morning and we'll probably see again that it's not just, it's not only heart knowledge, although heart knowledge is very important, or a heart relationship, it's also heart and mind. You know we spoke this morning about the word, the importance of the living word of God, and interacting with that word, which reveals and speaks to us about who God is, the revelation of God.

And the more we know God, the more we understand Him from His word, the easier it be, well, maybe that's not the right word. The more clearly we see the significant calling we have to walk worthy of Him, to walk in the light of His glory as it were.

[3 : 58] And what I want to do just for a moment is look at God from this passage, just for a moment, just in a very simple way, to remind us of who God is, the God that Isaiah saw in this unbelievable vision, and recognize that this same God is our God, this vision that he had, which was not just for him, but has been shared for us as well, so that we can see in his calling, in his commissioning, that he was spurred on, he was motivated by this astonishing vision of God.

And we see that God appeared to him at a certain specific time in history in the year that King Uzziah died, and we see him seated on a throne, high and exalted, and a train of his robe filled the temple.

It was a vision that Isaiah has here. It's a mixed vision. It's a mixed vision of a palace as well as the temple. There wasn't a throne in the temple, but we have here a palace and a temple, and it's reminding us of the kind of nature of God and the character of God, and the habitation of God with His people, but also the King, the King of Kings, and he's in this place, and he's high and lifted up.

He's high and exalted. He's lifted high. So there's all kinds of mixed metaphors. He's sitting on a throne, but he's high up, and he's exalted, and the train of his robe is filling the temple.

So it's simply a picture of his munificence and magnificence and greatness and glory that he is on the throne, sitting peacefully on the throne of this universe.

[5 : 48] He's sovereign. He's Lord. He's in control. He's the source of life. He's this great, powerful being to whom we're all accountable. The throne speaks of that.

It speaks of both lordship and kingship, but also of accountability, of judgment, and he's the God who has made us, and he's the God before whom each one of us will stand, standing before this amazing throne of God. There will be a day, you know?

There will be a day when we will all see this throne. There will be a day when we will stand before this living God before too long in his glory and in his wonder.

And sometimes we see this picture, this Old Testament picture of God high and lifted up and there's smoke around the temple, and it's kind of awesome. In fact, someone spoke to me this week. I was out at Heriot-Watt University doing their Christian Union.

Someone afterwards spoke to me and said, I liked what you had to say because I always think of God of the Old Testament as fiery and harsh and judgmental, and yet the Jesus of the New Testament is very loving.

[7 : 01] It was in many ways quite a cliched summary of the Bible and of God, and I was trying to explain that the two dovetail, the two come together, and very much so in John's Gospel, chapter 12.

I just want to look at this briefly, this verse, John chapter 12 and at verse 40, where the Jews are continuing in their unbelief. Jesus is preaching, he's speaking to them, they continue to disbelieve him. So John quotes from this passage, he quotes from Isaiah chapter 6. For this reason they could not believe because, as Isaiah said, elsewhere he is blind to their eyes and deadened their hearts so that they can neither see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts nor turn and I would heal them.

Isaiah, John says, listen, Isaiah said this because he, that is Isaiah, because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

So here we have Jesus' glory, John says, is being revealed in this passage in Isaiah 6. So this incredible vision of the Old Testament God is also a picture of the glory of Jesus, because Jesus, of course, is God, and we recognize that the two aspects, the two characteristics of God is great God of judgment and is great God of mercy and is great God of justice. They come together in his person, no more so than on the cross itself, where wrath is poured out and judgment is born on his own beloved son in our place in that great act of love.

He is high and exalted and as we see he is also surrounded by angelic beings in this vision that he has, the seraphim or the seraphs. Now these angelic beings, they are not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, this is the only place that they are named here and they are regarded as simply being part of the heavenly host.

[9 : 14] The beings that are not human but yet are very real and serve God around his throne, however we would understand that. The name kind of means the burning ones.

And again it's just a visionary picture of who God is and these beings, whatever they are, whatever they're like, we're told here they've got six wings, two of them cover their face, two of them cover their feet and with two they're flying.

So there's this picture of weird kind of beings but they've got their wings they're serving particular purposes, they're symbolic and telling us that the covered faces reminding us that although they're perfect beings and that they're surrounding and around God's throne, there's a sense of restraint as they cover their faces, you know, even in their perfection there's a holiness to this God that they are near, there's a mystery that leaves them having to cover their faces and that's a symbolic picture for us, a message for us about the nature and the character and the holiness of our God. There's a, I don't mean to make a light image but for me it's quite a powerful one in the film of Lord of the Rings towards the end where the Hobbits have come to be praised kind of for the way that they were involved in the rescue or the destruction of the ring and there's this massive crowd, you know, all done very digitally, there's this massive crowd and there's the six little Hobbits that are smaller than everyone else and at that point the king is speaking to them and they bow down to the king and he says, stop, he says, you bow down to no one because there's a sense in which these little, very ordinary people have done such an amazing thing that no one in the kingdom should bow down to them that rather the kingdom and indeed the king bows down to them.

Well, there's a sense in which that, we recognize that picture of God nobody bows down to him, nobody. He's this amazing being that nobody bows down to, that he is glorious and he is God and he is unique in his worship and he is unique in his being so they have these covered faces but also their feet are covered with the wings also which suggests that they can't approach the king, they can't come near to him there's a separation even as they approach him their feet are covered, they can't walk towards him, it's a great being and it's very difficult for us to comprehend that, it's very difficult for us to grasp that but it's a picture of God, it's a picture of who he is and then the third pair of wings they have are for flying and it would seem that these wings symbolize the kind of freedom that they do have but also the freedom they have to do his bidding that they are serving him and they are working to do his will as we see slightly later on one of them flies to the altar to get the burning coal so they're doing the bidding of God and they sing out they cry out with a thunderous voice

I don't know if you have the image of these serifs as kind of almost a wispy kind of beings almost see through like sometimes we think of angels and their kind of wings and the fragile and they could break that kind of picture of heavenly beings but here we're told that they call out as they're flying to one another Holy Holy Holy is the Lord Almighty, the Holy Spirit and the sound of their voices, the doorpost and thresholds shook it's not a picture of fragility and whispering Holy, it's very Holy God rather thunderous loud voice that shakes the whole place and Isaiah in this vision just senses just coming through like a hugely loud amplifying sound that just comes right through him as everything shakes as they praise God and that they acknowledge who he is and how wonderful and glorious he is in his being and this thrice Holy God now, a lot of commentators when they're talking about these passages say that the thrice Holy claim Holy Holy Holy doesn't refer to the Trinity

[13 : 56] I really struggle with that because they say that Isaiah wouldn't have understood what the Trinity was about in the Old Testament because God was one God as it was revealed in the Old Testament but I think it goes beyond that and I think for me clearly it speaks of this thrice Holy God who is Holy in his fatherhood and his sons ship and in his Holy Spirit and it's just recognizing the nature and the character of who God is all sufficient, the whole earth is full of his glory so our reminder to us that we have to look, spoke a lot of this morning about the Bible and finding about his glory in the Bible which is absolutely right and true it's his revelation but we find also about his glory in the whole earth don't we and the beauty and the magnificence and the glory of the world in which we live his creative power and genius and the complexity of people and community and love and family and relationships all of these things the seraphs can see it, they can see the glory of God in all of these things and so they worship and praise him can we see it?

as we walk down the street can we see his glory? do we sense that his glory fills the whole earth? or is it only compartments of our lives?

we sing that beautiful hymn about how great they were and the beautiful pictures of the forest glades and the gentle streams and it's so powerfully a recognition of who God is and we will not serve God unless we understand and see who he is you know I've said that a lot haven't I?

I've said to myself so often because I pray for forgiveness for not being able to see him I don't serve you Lord because I don't see that you're worth it you're small, you're insignificant but as we see God we serve him, we're able to serve him but we gain a good understanding in order to serve him and the partnership that he has with us when we understand ourselves and as Isaiah was given his vision of God he also sensed what he was like himself in verse 5 isn't it?

he says when he was given his vision, woe is me I cried I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips really?

[16 : 33] is that how we feel? is that the kind of reaction we want to be close to God? you know people talk about I really want to be close with God I want to sense his presence in his nearness do we?

if this is the kind of reaction we think that when we're close to God it's going to be we're going to be skipping around the place woohoo it's great we're close to God, life's wonderful, I feel his grace his pleasure and his forgiveness we may well do but we will also sense as Isaiah did here the fact that he was broken up he felt like his whole being was dissembled in the presence of God he was being broken down, he was unknown before God there's a sense of despair in his voice as he responds to the breathtaking holiness of God if you've ever been in a dark room I was watching probably for about the 150th time the Shawshank redemption the other night and the guy who is the kind of star of it he was in the hole for two months just black, a black print for the punishment he was in this cell without any windows and then when the door is opened and the light shines he just recoils and he just goes into a kind of ball because he can't face the light can't come near the light and that's really what we're seeing here with Isaiah he recoils from the light as he sees who God is the breathtaking holiness of God and even in the beauty of his conversation he was a great prophet he had great communicative abilities he felt unclean, his lips his conversation, his words were unclean he lived among a people who were unclean because that seemed to reflect his heart he felt the words that he had he reflected the uncleanness of his heart before this holy God and for us there's that, isn't there?

there's that inescapable reality as we delve into who God is and as we consider him and understand him we recognize that he is a God who does expose our uncleanness and that's unpalatable in many ways for us he exposes and we can recoil from his holiness but we give thanks to God and we give thanks to the reality of the nature of God that we serve him as we see him and as we see ourselves and as we see grace because that's what's great about this passage, isn't it?

it shows us God, it shows us ourselves because it shows us the answer to our need and it shows us grace and in verse 7 we've got that amazing picture of the seraph who comes and takes a live coal and he touches Isaiah's mouth and he says, see this, that your guilt is taken away your sin is atoned for this is a great vision, you know we're at a visual age you're having a sit here listening to me I know it's difficult but you can use your imagination and you can think about the visual reality of this the senses are being stoked in this commissioning that he's given, not only is he seeing this amazing thing but he's smelling the smoke and that reminds him that it's in the context of sacrifice in the temple of smoke was because there was sacrifice and sacrifice spoke about the sharing of blood and sharing of blood spoke about atonement about the things that were wrong being put right it speaks about the Passover lamb and it speaks about that Jesus Christ is a redeemer the live calls reminding us of the living reality of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the touch, not just the smell not just the vision but the touch isn't that amazing, he's touched with the coal the personal reality of that it's like Jesus with the blind man isn't it he didn't just say see, he touched him because the blind man needs touch yeah, he does and so here we see in this amazing vision that all the senses of Isaiah are being just stoked by what's happening and he's being reminded that God has put the wrong things right and his guilt has been forgiven isn't that an amazing reality your guilt is forgiven your sin is atoned for your guilt is taken away see if we don't see grace sorry if we don't see ourselves we will never see an understanding for grace and if we don't see grace we will never understand our calling to serve this God of grace see if we're serving him or if we're not serving him it's possibly because we can't see our need for grace if we are serving him but it's not motivated by grace it's possibly because we want to earn our favour with him or because we're afraid or because we are guilty and guilt is driving us but he calls us to serve him in partnership because he's forgiven us because he's put wrongs right that's what Calvary is about he says I've put the wrong right

I've paid the price your sin is atoned for you're at one at one at atonement being at one with God through Jesus Christ as a Christian and I've forgiven your guilt isn't guilt unforgiven or unrecognised so much part of our identity crisis we live our lives trying to be something because we're guilty because we're not right because we're not at peace because we need to earn something but knowing that our guilt is forgiven is the change grace he sees as the start of healing and it's the start of self-worth in our lives so that leads me just to the conclusion which is to a willing response you know we're citizens we're citizens of God's kingdom we're called by God we saw that in our verse in Thessalonians he calls us every one of us well what's he calling us to and with this I finish what's he calling us to well we read Elijah's calling it was tough wasn't it it was really tough he was called as a prophet of God a tough call to preach a message of judgment really to God's people in the Old Testament and it was a message that was long in coming they'd been warned about it they'd been told to turn from their idols that God loved them

[23 : 56] God cared for them God would keep them in this promised land but if they kept turning aside if they kept closing their ears if they stopped listening then they would lose the privileges that they had they would be taken into captivity and the land would be given over to foreigners the warnings that Elijah was given were really the fulfillment of what God had already said would happen we find that difficult there's no doubt there's difficulties in these words we don't like that but again we recognise the honesty the truthfulness of who God is and the reality of what he says he says there can be... there's no grace without judgment there can be no grace and there is this great need of recognising who is on the throne and he's reminding us that as Christians if we choose deliberately if we stand before God and choose even though we don't think we maybe stand before God we're making the decision on our own we just stand before God and sin with impunity if we say I know this is wrong but I'm going to do it anyway

I know this will grieve my Saviour but I'm so desperate for this and I want this so much that I'm going to do it anyway then the reminder is that there's a price to pay for that we don't lose our salvation we recognise that we know that but there's always a price to pay for going against the living God because he loves us and because he wants to keep us from sin but for us, what does it mean for us as citizens?

well it means again to go back to 2nd 1 Thessalonians that we are to walk worthy, okay? we're calling it as believers when we know and have seen God, when we've seen ourselves when we've been touched by grace is to be Christians who walk worthy of our calling the passage speaks about Thessalonians and you say well what's your calling?

well what's my calling? well your calling is to walk worthy whatever you do what worthy is a Christian tonight? whatever you do you're a servant of Jesus you're a minister of Jesus Christ there's no secular no sacred and secular divide that's a new word, a secular that's a half Christian half un-Christian a secularist, okay?

but no, there's no sacred or secular divide and we all have a calling and the Holy Spirit is with us we're called to be as disciples whether it's again as I was praying earlier whether it's in the classroom or whether it's in the place of employment or in the home whatever we are we are called to be disciples we're called to walk worthy that's our calling that's what He wants us to do to walk from this place tonight and walk worthy of this great God watch how we speak remembering we're ambassadors of Christ walk how we decide how we think how we act the decisions we make the choices that we choose and I would encourage you this evening to walk worthy of Jesus Christ and I would encourage you in the same light to think about your life think about your career as a Christian think about your marriage think about your singleness think about the choices you make think about the gifts that He's given to you and the experience you have and then think, how can I serve God best with these gifts in this one short life that I have you know, the amazing thing is for us we don't get lots of opportunities we don't get to live our life once and say

[27 : 50] I'll try next time and next time I'll not make the same mistakes that I made this time we don't get that we just get one life and He wants us because He gives us the strength and the courage and the resources in the Holy Spirit to walk worthy think about your life and what you're doing think about whether you've got the gifts and the aptitudes for full time Christian service there's lots of things to do in His kingdom and what I mean by that is full time it's Christian work all our work is full time in a sense but full time Christian service young men think about your gifts and talents for the ministry of the gospel for being preachers, evangelists there's a great need in Scotland to re-evangelise this nation what are you doing with your lives?

who are you thinking of spending your gifts and talents on? pray about these things and all of us have to pray well what is it that God wants for me not just what we often do what I often do is you pray really what you want yourself and you want God to rubber stamp it it's really not praying for God's will to be done you're just praying because it's the right thing to do but you actually you really want to do this and you hope somehow God will rubber stamp that but pray with an open mind and say what is it Lord that you want for me?

are you turning me round? in a different direction? what is it? you're calling me into partnership with you and think about that and do think about that in your lives and lastly and briefly remember also to serve willingly I love the response of Elijah sorry of Isaiah here who says when God asks the question whom shall I send and who will go for us he says here am I? send me you know there's a great enthusiasm and a great willingness a great willing response here from Isaiah to God's call and you know we were quite often well but I suppose if there's nothing else to do I could maybe do it and I've tried everything else and I've been rubbish at that so maybe I'll go into the ministry that's probably the thing I thought I did but we have to have a willing service we don't want our Christian lives to be guilt ridden or I ought to and I must and I have to with gritted teeth but we're looking for this willing service I will go here am I? just send me use me you know even at a very kind of mundane level in the church it's fantastic to have people who will take on something that needs to be done in the church willingly who will champion something you know and who don't need pushed and or reminded and or given the guilt trip to do it or anything and don't do it as a favour and don't do it to gain brownie brownie points but just want to serve the Lord and are willing to do it and recognise that when they're working for the church and working in the church they have to put up with me and others like me who don't support them enough and who don't remember things and who get things wrong and who make mistakes but who willingly for Jesus Christ's sake are willing to champion something and do it to all of their might so we see God and see ourselves we see grace may we be those who recognise he's calling us into partnership with himself every one of us is Christians, partners with God our identity is in that partnership and in that service and may we be moved to serve him and again I encourage you if you're not a Christian to really consider who he is who God is and see yourself before him but also see grace and receive grace into your heart let's pray

Lord God help us to know you and understand you better may we serve you as partners what a great joy and what a great privilege that you've chosen people like us who let you down and who don't see clearly and who misunderstand and who are sometimes ignorant or selfish or greedy or proud and self-absorbed and yet you choose to work with us you pour out your spirit into our hearts to live with us and you give us great responsibilities and you ask the question whom shall I send who will go who will serve me and may we respond tonight to that call of service as Christians both locally in St. Columba's but however we serve in our lives and may there be people committed to hear the voice of God and to full-time Christian service to missionary work, to the ministry of the gospel, to evangelism to church planting to pastoral work or we pray for these things help us and forgive our sins in Jesus' name. Amen.