

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So we have some very interesting readings and we're going to get right into it with Isaiah. Isaiah is getting called by God and the glory of God shows up in the Seraphim. And we have this description of the Seraphim. However, we need to remember this. The description of the Seraphim is not a physical description of what they look like. Even though it's talking about six wings, and cover head and feet, and flying, it's more a description of the essence of what an angel is, what a Seraphim is. Angels are spirits. They have no bodily form. But what we are hearing from Isaiah is an angel appears, and the glory of God is reflected through that angel, and that is signified by the wings covering the face of the angel.

Because imagine Moses going up on the mountain and seeing just a glimpse of the backside of the glory of God, and he had to wear a veil for the rest of his life because it was too much for people to see just a brief reflection of the glory of God, and it was too much for us to bear. And this is an angel who is in the eyes of God for all eternity. What would that be like? Of course, whenever an angel shows up, your terrified. These are creatures that are in the presence of God, spirits that are with God and praising his name, holy, holy, holy, which we're going to sing in our communion hymn, but this great grand word of praise of... So the wings covering their face is a symbol that they are in the presence of God and cannot show their face. The glory of God is too much for us to bear.

And then of course, you have the wings covering the feet. And of course, think about the feet in the days when you're walking around in sandals all day long in dirt roads. These are the nastiest, smelliest, dirtiest things on your body, and they're not worthy to become in the presence of God. And so again, the wings covering the feet are a sign of the covering of the uncleanness, of the unworthiness of angels, or us for that matter, coming into the presence of God. And then of course, the wings to fly, their spirits, they can appear and disappear at will. And so this is a description of the essence of what an angel is. It describes the essence that they are in the presence of God. And what does Isaiah do when the angel who's in the presence of God comes and talks to him? "Woe is me. I am undone."

He recognizes even a representative of coming to visit him and he is completely unworthy and he is undone, as would every single one of us be. And yet the angel comes and takes a coal, a burning coal from the altar, and places it on the lips of Isaiah, and he declares him to be clean that his sin is atoned for. Okay, so we're going to start a new ritual this week. We're going to take burning coals when you come up for com... No. Can you imagine? But think about the seriousness, that to burn the lips, the sin of humanity must be purged, and the angel does it through the coals on the altar. Well, why does that purge his sin? What happens on the altar but the sacrifice of God for humanity, the sacrifice of sins, which is in place of and

holding a spot for the time when the final ultimate sacrifice is going to come, Jesus Christ.

And so in that coal is a representation of the sacrifice that is happening right then and there, but also the future sacrifice that will wipe away the sins of all the humanity. And God is giving that to Isaiah. He is giving his word to Isaiah so that Isaiah might preach the gospel of God to the people, that Isaiah might proclaim the word of God. Isaiah is often called the Fifth Gospel, or the Gospel in the New Testament, or in the Old Testament, because there is so much richness about the suffering servant, about what the Messiah is going to do and how he's going to do it. And here's God purifying with the sacrifice in anticipation of the future sacrifice. And then the ultimate sacrifice shows up in Jesus in our New Testament passage. And he is speaking again. He does not need to be purified because he is the glory of God, humiliated and humbled in the form of a man so that we might see him and hear him and not be afraid.

And so people are flocking to hear him speak. So he goes out on this little boat so that they can hear him because they're just crowding and pushing him to the shore. He preaches, and everybody's amazed at what he's saying. And then he tells Simon, "You know what? Go out in the middle of the lake, in the middle of the day, and go lay down your nets." And the [inaudible 00:05:40] going, "Really? Seriously, we've been there all night. That's when you catch fish, and we still caught nothing, and you're going to have us go in the middle of the day? Nothing's going to happen. But you told us to, so okay." So he goes out, and what do they do? They catch the most massive catch that they've ever had, so much so that it practically sinks two boats. It's so tremendous.

And of course, what does Simon do? He recognizes that the glory of God has showed up, so he is terrified. He almost says, in essence, the same thing that Isaiah said, "Get away from me, Lord. I'm unworthy. I'm undone." You can almost hear those words in Peter, "I am unworthy, for I am a sinful man. And Jesus doesn't take coals from the altar but his own word, which is what purifies us all, and he speaks to Peter and says, "Get up. I will make you catch fish from now on. I will put my words in your mouth and you will proclaim my message to the people, just as he did with Isaiah." And so we never need to worry about what's going on in our lives. You think about what God gave to Peter, this temporary abundance of fish. They could sell this for days. They were going to make their quota finally. It was going to be a wonderful, wonderful month.

Everything was good temporarily. And yet, they had this great blessing from God, and what did they do? They walked away from it, left it on the shore, and went to follow Jesus, because the word of God was more precious and valuable to them than the temporary filling of their bellies or their bank accounts. Because the

blessings of God are not only and especially not focused upon what's going on here and now, the temporal benefits. What God promises to give us is so much greater than having our bellies fed and our bank account secure. It's about salvation and the forgiveness of sins. It's about the opportunity to be able to stand before God without fear.

We don't need to be afraid and say, "I am undone," or, "Go away from me. I'm a sinner." We've already committed to being a sinner, and we've been absolved and we are free. And what a joyous day that is. And what makes us free? It is the word of God. And that's what Paul's talking about in this First Corinthians passage. He's really causing us to focus upon what is valuable. What are we to be doing? We should strive to excel in building up the church. And what builds up the church but good word from the Lord? Now he gets talking about tongues and everything, and I'm not going to get into that, okay? There's a lot of theories about, what is tongues? We know for sure that tongues happened on Pentecost when the disciples spoke in the languages of the people and they heard it in their own tongue, even though the disciples didn't know Latin and all the other different languages out there.

We know that that's true. The rest of it, there's a lot of debate about it. Whether it was only for them and it's no longer for now, it doesn't really matter. That's not the point of this passage. Speaking in tongues, if indeed we still have it happening, if you have that happening, is only beneficial to you, unless it's interpreted. What's more important, as Paul says, is, "I'd rather speak five intelligible words that lift up the church than 10,000 in a different tongue that nobody understands." The point that Paul is trying to make is, we should value the word of God above all else, because the word is what lifts us up. The word is what sanctifies and justifies and purifies us. The word of God is the equivalent of that coal placed upon the mouth of Isaiah. It cleanses us and purges us of our sin. And all of that was accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross. And we receive that benefit so much so that we can leave the catch of fish at the shore.

We don't spend our lives as Christians concerned about the day-to-day, whether or not we're going to have enough food and how we're going to make it, because we know that God will provide. And so we walk by faith, knowing that the greater gift, even if we may suffer in this world, even if we come down with sickness, even if our loved ones die too soon, even if we lose our jobs, even if everything falls apart in our lives, we still know we are blessed by God. Abundantly beyond measure that we cannot even imagine. Because his word is more valuable than gold or silver or a huge couple of boatloads of fish. It's more precious than anything else, and he gives it to you and to me as a gift so that when God shows

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up, we do not need to be afraid. We will not say with Isaiah, "Woe is me. I am undone."

Because Christ said on the cross, "It is finished." And because of that, when Christ comes again, we will bow. Every knee is going to bow, that's a given, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But we're going to be doing it out of celebration, out of the joy of our salvation. Our Father has come to bring us home, finally. So even death is nothing to be afraid of, because the gift that he gives in following him is greater and more abundant than anything we could possibly imagine or want or need. Trust in him, stand firmly on his word, and hold fast to the promises that you are forgiven. Your sins are atoned for. You are clean. May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.