

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin  
The Bridge and Contemporary Services  
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## The Way It Was: Isaiah, the Old Testament Gospel Writer

Boker Tov. Good morning. When I lived 700 years ago before the birth of our Messiah, our God recognized that his people needed to hear a great many prophecies about the coming Messiah to carry them through some very difficult times. I was honored that the Holy Spirit chose me to be his instrument. Because of that, people call me the Old Testament Evangelist, the Old Testament Gospel Writer. The needs of God's people haven't really changed. That's why I was invited to speak to you today to tell you the way it was. My name is Isaiah.

I would like to tell you my story based on four kings of Jerusalem under whom I served.

**First let me tell you about King Uzziah and the need for the Gospel.**

Uzziah was the king of my youth. He reigned for 52 years, so by the time I became a young man, it seemed that he had been king "forever." He was a powerful king, a God-fearing king, at least early in his reign. But that power led to pride. He wasn't content being a powerful king, he also wanted to take on the role as priest. He "entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense" (2 Chronicles 26:16). You don't have the temple any more, but in the days before the Messiah, only the priests could go into the Holy Place of the temple and burn incense at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice. The priests tried to stop him, but Uzziah insisted. He went into the Holy Place with the priests following him. He started yelling at the priests right there in the temple in the presence of the Lord... but then suddenly everything changed. The Lord afflicted him with leprosy right there in the temple. So he was hurried out. He had leprosy for the rest of his life. He had to live by himself and his son Jotham governed the people.

Why do I mention Uzziah? Because something similar happened to me. It was in the year that King Uzziah died that the Lord called me to be a prophet. In a vision, I was in the temple. "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs [angelic beings filled with flame], 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. '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).

Unclean lips. That was certainly true of King Uzziah. He raged at the priests in the temple. But that was true of me and my contemporaries. Many people were just going through the motions of worship. They would make sure the offerings were made, they observed the religious festivals, but their hearts were far from God. They claimed to love God, but then would engage in sexual immorality or use their power to abuse the poor. I'll be honest, I got angry and sometimes got into heated arguments with them. They raged at me and I raged at them.

King Uzziah had come into the presence of the Lord and was cast out, unclean because of leprosy. So in this vision, I was in the presence of the Lord, unclean as well, and deserved to be cast out. I became personally aware of my need for the gospel. But the vision continued...

“Then one of the seraphs 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.’”

At that time I didn't fully understand how my sin could be atoned for. It was later that the Holy Spirit spoke through me about the Messiah:

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.  
<sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6).

At this point in my ministry, I clearly understood the need for the gospel. Uzziah couldn't stand in the presence of the holy God without being condemned. I couldn't come into the presence of the holy God without being condemned. You can't come into the presence of the holy God without being condemned. We needed someone, the Messiah, who could stand in and take the punishment that we deserved. Later I would marvel at this prophecy that the Messiah would be my substitute.

I wasn't ruined by this vision as I at first thought. I was reborn. When I heard the voice ask, “Whom will I send and who will go for us?” I shouted out, “Here am I! Send me!”

**This is what happens when you step into the presence of the Lord!**

But just because the gospel is needed, doesn't mean that the gospel will be believed.

## **Let me tell you about King Ahaz and the rejection of the gospel.**

King Ahaz began his reign shortly after I was called to be a prophet. He was a wicked king who turned away from the Lord altogether and worshipped the Canaanite god Baal. He even sacrificed some of his sons to these gods.

One day King Ahaz was on the north side of the city, checking the fortifications of the city at its weakest point. He was facing an alliance of two kings that wanted to dethrone him. The Lord sent me there to confront him. “Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart” (Isaiah 7:4). He didn’t have to be afraid of the alliance against him because the Lord would destroy this alliance.

But King Ahaz didn’t believe me. Humanly speaking, I guess it wasn’t much of surprise. Earlier in his reign, Ahaz had lost 120,000 men in one battle to just one of the kings who now stood against him. Where was the Lord then? So he didn’t believe my message.

Then the Lord did something unusual. He invited King Ahaz to test him. “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or the highest heights” (Isaiah 7:10).

When the Holy Spirit inspired me to speak these words, I almost choked on them. The LORD was telling this wicked king Ahaz, “I am still the God who loves you. In spite of your many sins, I am willing to be called ‘your God.’”

But Ahaz didn’t believe. He wouldn’t trust in the LORD no matter what the sign. So in the face of this rejection of the Gospel, the LORD inspired me to announce an impossible sign: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel” which means “God with us!” (Isaiah 7:14)

In just a few short weeks you will again celebrate the fulfillment of this promise. You are going to celebrate that a virgin had a son who is God himself, Immanuel, God with us. What I want you to note is this. Even if you and I are unfaithful, God is faithful. He will keep his promises. What a comfort that can be for us! Each of us has been Ahaz, not trusting that God could help us in a variety of situations. But if you see this sin in yourself, that you have rejected gospel, I warn you in advance that Satan will whisper in your ear, “It is too late. God doesn’t want you anymore.” But when you hear that message, remember King Ahaz. God is faithful even when we are unfaithful. Immanuel, God with us, has come to rescue us from our sin and death.

How can you know that? **Are you looking for a sign** to prove that God can love someone even as sinful as you? Read the life of the Messiah. See his miracles to assure you that he is God with us! Immanuel! They are the signs that are absolutely reliable when you feel overwhelmed by your sins.

But it isn’t just your sins that can overwhelm you. Sometimes our problems make all of us feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders. With that in mind...

## **Let me tell you about King Hezekiah and the Victory of the Gospel.**

King Ahaz' unbelief had a lasting effect on the next king, King Hezekiah. Rather than trust in the Lord, Ahaz had trusted in an alliance he made with the King of Assyria. The Assyrians were more than willing to come and defeat Ahaz' enemies. But they didn't stop there. They pressed south and attached Judah too.

So it was that this time it was the Assyrians that were threatening to destroy Jerusalem. But King Hezekiah was very different from his father. When he felt the weight of the world on his shoulders, he went to the temple and spread out his problems before the Lord. I had the privilege of coming and telling him that the Assyrian army that was facing him was not going to defeat him. It seemed impossible, but the Holy Spirit inspired me to tell him, "The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this" (2 Kings 19:31).

Do you know what happened that night? The angel of the LORD went through the camp of the Assyrians and 185,000 soldiers died in their sleep that night.

You may not have 185,000 Assyrian soldiers outside your home, but there are certainly times in your life when the worries of this world overwhelm you. That's the background for the prophecy the Holy Spirit gave to me that I recorded in the ninth chapter of my book:

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...  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
will accomplish this.

Again the Holy Spirit led me to tell a king about a child who would be born. This child would be Wonderful... That was a name for God himself for only God can do "wonders" or miracles. Counselor... He would be the God who can sympathize with us in our weaknesses because he would be a human being too. He knows and understands what it is like when the weight of the world is on your shoulders and it is too heavy to bear. Mighty God... the God who will go out and fight the battles for us. Everlasting Father... the One whose care and concern will never be diminished by age or death. Prince of peace... peace in Hebrew is "shalom." It means that "everything will be all right." The child born is the one who can assure us when everything is going wrong, "Everything will be all right."

That's why I wrote, "The government will be on his shoulders." The weight of the world, all the responsibilities that you feel are crushing you, are on his shoulders, not yours. You can trust him. How do I know? Because the Holy Spirit inspired me to write again, "The zeal of the LORD

Almighty will accomplish this” (Isaiah 9:7). The one who could do the impossible and save Hezekiah from 185,000 Assyrian soldiers can save you from the cares and concerns that threaten to overwhelm you.

This is true, even when it seems you have lost everything. I experienced that at the end of my ministry.

### **Let me tell you about King Manasseh and the Gospel Rest.**

It is so sad that godly King Hezekiah had one of the most ungodly offspring succeed him as king. Manasseh reversed all the reforms of his father Hezekiah. As a result, I lost my position of influence at the royal court. Perhaps you have read how I died. The author of Hebrews references the ancient Jewish tradition that I was sawn in two. King Manasseh was seeking my life and I hid in a hollow tree. The king ordered his soldiers to cut the tree down, with me inside of it.

All of you will also experience a time in your life when you will lose everything. It may be that you lose a position of influence. It may be that you lose your mobility. Ultimately, unless the Messiah comes back first, you will all lose your life.

### **What can carry you through when you have lost everything?**

It was in my last moments on this earth that I remembered the words the Holy Spirit gave me that are recorded in chapter 11 of my prophecy.

The chapter begins with the fact that royal line from King David will become a stump. In my mind, with the wickedness of King Manasseh, that had already happened. But the Holy Spirit promised that a shoot would come out of that dead stump. King David’s royal line would not end with wicked King Manasseh. King Messiah would come from David’s line. Physically, I wasn’t experiencing peace at that moment that I was about to die, but I knew peace was coming:

The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;  
and a little child will lead them.

<sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the cobra’s den,  
and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest.

<sup>9</sup> They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain (Isaiah 11).

As I was dying, as I was losing everything, by faith I could look to King Messiah who would give me eternal peace in heaven. By faith I could see that “his place of rest would be glorious.”

I've covered a lot of ground this morning. I lived it so it is fresh in my mind. But it is probably not that fresh in your mind. I would invite you to walk through this with me again this week by reading chapters 6 to 11 of my prophecy. I want you to know the way it was, the way it is. King Messiah allows you to come into his presence. King Messiah is always with you. King Messiah will carry your burdens. King Messiah will give you eternal rest. Amen.

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