

Isaiah 6: Anthropology

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Anthropology is a big word with a lot of definitions and very differing views. Is it important? Your anthropology determines your view of God, it determines your view of religion, sin, salvation, and many other things. Most picture it from a secular worldly view, so a Biblical view of anthropology is in the minority. Anthropology is the study of the nature of man.

Because of the events in Isaiah 6, Isaiah's view of God changed radically because his view of the nature of man changed radically. Before, he viewed himself as a good person, religious, who did good deeds, led a good life, he was focused on his goals, and he felt deserving of God's favor. Afterward, he was humble, sober, felt undeserving, desperate, had no self-reliance, and no self-dependence. It is natural to man to feel pride in who I am and what I have done; so Isaiah had to unlearn that before he could truly serve God. Isaiah learned to have pride in who God is, and what God has done.

Words and Phrases

Every culture develops words and phrases unique to it that are very revealing of the nature of the people in it. In the last 10-15 years in sports, phrases like "corking the bat", and "taking the juice" have real meaning to us. In business it's "cooking the books" and "after hours trading". Many Americans have great pride in being a "self made man". I always want to add, "How nice of you to relieve God of the blame." When you say I am a self made man it means you started with nothing and now you are great and/or have a lot of stuff. What it really means is that you are smarter, more talented, and more ambitious. It escapes your notice---your anthropology, that God created you. God gave you those brain cells, that talent, and the good health to use them.

A Whole New Ball Game

After Isaiah's experience in ch.6, he had a whole new anthropology, meaning a whole new view of himself, his nature, his value, and accomplishments. He got a close-up view of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness. He saw true righteousness and it wasn't him. As Jesus said, "Only God is good" (Mark 10:18), or as Paul said "I have no righteousness of my own, the righteousness I have is the imputed righteousness of Christ" (Phil.3:9).

You may say, "How pessimistic and depressing"---NO, what we see is that Isaiah is now free to serve God as never before. Pride, ego, self-righteousness had him bound up, held him prisoner, but now he was free. Popularity, success, or fear of rejection was no longer an issue. It was no longer about him, now it was all about God.

The Text of Isaiah 6

Isaiah lived and ministered in Jerusalem between 740-680 B.C. In 740 good King Uzziah died, and then his son Jotham took over. Jotham died, and he was succeeded by Ahaz in 731. King Ahaz was evil, and according to 2 Kings 16, Ahaz was an idol worshiper who even sacrificed his own baby son in the fire. Isaiah was born into a wealthy family of royal blood in Jerusalem, but when Uzziah died something incredible happened that forever changed Isaiah's life. God gave Isaiah a heavenly vision. The glory of it was frightening, and the holiness of it was humbling. He saw God's glory, the highest order of angels, and he heard the heavenly host praising and glorifying God. All of his senses were involved---the sights, sounds, smell of smoke, and he felt the trembling foundations at the voice of God; but the main thing that moved Isaiah, and provoked his response was the holiness of God. It humbled him, and it convicted him of his own unworthiness.

The Before and After

Isaiah had been self assured, he had felt good about himself, he was exalted by his peers, looked up to by men; but now he was fully aware of being unclean, unworthy, and just a sinner---hopelessly so. Just as many great men, before and after Isaiah, when confronted with the true holiness of God, he was humbled. Take Job for instance, he was sure that he was being unjustly punished, but when God confronted him he said, "now that my eyes see you (witness your glory), I retract everything I said, and I repent in dust and ashes" (the ultimate sign of humility). When God revealed His glory at Mt. Sinai to Moses and the people of Israel, it scared the poop out of them. Before, the people had been arrogant and demanding, but now the people begged Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen, but let not God speak to us or we will surely die." In the New Testament, both Paul and John had these same experiences of being taken up to heaven to see and hear the glory and holiness of God, and it proved to be life-changing experiences for them as well.

What does this say about the common perception of God as our good buddy, our kindly grandfather, or Santa Claus? In a book entitled *Your God is too Small*, J.B. Phillips said we are in danger of "creating for ourselves a god who exists only to serve us".

In Isaiah 6:5, upon witnessing the glory and holiness of God, Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

The Grace of God, Isaiah 6:6-7

Being completely humbled and seeing no hope for himself at all, "then one of the seraphim (angels) flew to me with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar. He touched my mouth with it and said, "...your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven." God initiated the cleansing, God pronounced him clean. The altar represents where sacrifices for sin were made, except in heaven there are no animal sacrifices, there is just one sacrifice acceptable for sin, the sacrifice that God initiated with His Son Jesus Christ. So this forgiveness, like ours, is based on that same sacrifice of Jesus that Isaiah foresaw; and God knowing and planning that sacrifice, passed over all sins previously committed.

Notice in Isa.6:7, "your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven", that Isaiah is passive, God is the active agent. Isaiah's part was to humble himself, admit his sin, then receive God's grace by faith.

The Call

In verse 8 the question is asked by God, "Whom shall I send"? Who will deliver a very difficult and unwanted message? Isaiah has no impression that he is being forced into service, he freely steps up out of great appreciation, and a desire to serve driven by his understanding of what God has done for him.

Observations and Applications

1. What we all need is an acute awareness of the extent of the grace of God, the extent of God's forgiveness---the mountain that God has moved for me.

1. We are fortunate to get these glimpses of heaven in the Word of God, so don't think your present state is anything at all, because the future is everything. As Paul said in Rom.8:18, "this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

1. Anthropology---the human condition is hopeless. If a great man like Isaiah would say, "woe is me" then where is there hope for the rest of us? Only in God's grace.

1. Many people see Christ as someone who would take away their freedom and change their lifestyle. The truth is that only when our burden of guilt is removed can we be free. Only when the bonds of selfishness and pride are removed can we be free to be fulfilled by serving the Lord.

1. God does not exist to serve us. WE EXIST TO SERVE HIM.

1. We all have been called and are being called---most of us are just a little deaf. Biblically, we were called by God first to salvation, and we are being called to serve Him now. There is a great need in all of us to have a sense of meaning and purpose. God created us with that, and we will be restless until we answer God's call, "Who shall I send?"

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