

A MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE

Dr. George O. Wood

I have a strange scripture to read for a Mother's Day message. I've taken it from the Old Testament and I'm going to read it from the Living Bible. Isaiah 6 *"In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne and the temple was filled with his glory. Hovering about him were mighty six wing seraphim with six wings singing holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with his glory. Such singing it was. It shook the temple to its foundations and suddenly the entire sanctuary was filled with smoke. Then I said, 'My doom is sealed because I am an unclean man. A member of a sinful, unholy of speech human race. I have looked upon the king, the Lord of heaven's armies. Then one of the seraphim flew over to the altar and with a pair of tongs picked out a burning coal. He touched my lips with it and said, 'Now you are pronounced not guilty because this coal has touched your lips. Your sins be all forgiven. Then I heard the Lord asking, 'Whom should I send as a messenger to my people? Who will go?' and I said, 'Lord, I'll go! Send me!' and he said, 'Yes, go! But tell my people this: though you hear my words repeatedly you won't understand them. Though you watch and watch as I perform my miracles still you won't know what they mean. Dull their understanding. Close their ears and shut their eyes. I don't want them to see and to hear or to understand or to turn to me to heal them.' Then I said, 'Lord, how long will it be until they are ready to listen?' and he replied, 'Not until their cities are destroyed without a person left and the whole country is an utter wasteland and they're all taken away as slaves to other countries far away and all the land of Israel lies deserted. Yet a tenth, a remnant will survive and though Israel is invaded again and again and destroyed. Yet Israel will be like a tree cut down, whose stump still lives to grow again.'"*

Like I said, it was a strange text for a Mother's Day. But out of it comes four urgent, pressing questions.

The first question is this: what's going on out there? I'm concerned about that as a parent who has brought children into the world. What's going on out here? Isaiah is at the beginning of his manhood and what is going on out there for him is that King Uzziah died. In the year king Uzziah died."

That's a strange name to us. But for Isaiah that was a very important name. It meant a transition into kingship that there was now the potential of a period of uncertainty and instability. King Uzziah as co-regent first and then later a sole monarch ruled longer as a king in Israel than any other king. A total of 52 years he had set on the throne. Longer than David. Longer than Solomon. Longer than Asa or Manassa or Hezekiah. Longer than them all.

We change presidents every eight years or four years or sometimes less than that. It seems like when a president serves two full terms which we haven't had since Eisenhower that it's like a decade had gone by and we're looking at the next election and a time of uncertainty.

Here for 52 years there had been certainty. Now with this king gone, the king of whom it is said as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. That king is now gone and Isaiah as a young man is facing stepping into a generation of political uncertainty, economic uncertainty, international danger and internal peril.

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52 years. I got to thinking about how long a time that is. Although I haven't lived quite that long. There's been a lot of changes that have taken place in my lifetime. A lot of changes taken place in your lifetime. Isaiah knew the change of the king and the uncertainty that brought. But probably there has never been in the whole history of humanity a generation of people who have known more change than the people in this present generation.

I am in the generation that lived before color television, before Vietnam, before computer, before rock music, before marijuana – when grass was something you mowed rather than smoked. Before cocaine – when coke was something you drank. Before video. Before stereo. Before space flight. We have seen tremendous technical and scientific changes and even greater, we have seen changes in values and morals. The family has been impacted. High divorce rates. Confused sexual values. Abortion, child abuse. A lot is changing.

Two books I've looked at recently: In One Day and American Averages: Amazing Facts of everyday life. They detail what's going on around us. What's going on out there every single 24 hours. Like police arrest the equivalent of 500 busloads of people every day – 28,000. Americans drink 15.7 million gallons of beer and ale every 24 hours. There's enough liter in bottles and cans from a day's drinking that would fill a baseball stadium 30 feet high. 100 robbers rob a convenience store every single day. 3000 Americans today will be confronted by a robber. 60 Americans today will be murdered over half from shots from a gun. Americans today will buy 38,000 Ken and Barbie dolls think about the role modeling that's going on. Americans smoke more than 86 million packs of cigarettes. Today we'll build 5 nuclear weapons in America. Americans all together will watch 1.5 billion hours of television. That's equal to 2300 human lifetimes. 2740 kids will run away from home. 5962 couples will wed but almost 2000 will divorce. 2740 teenagers will become pregnant today. 3230 women will have abortions today in America. 9077 babies will be born. 1282 to unmarried mothers. Today, 5500 Americans will die from one reason or another.

All that happening in America.

In the year King Uzziah died. What's going on out there? I think that young parents and younger people are worried about should I get married and have children in a culture such as the one we're living in today. It's a scary time to be raising kids because it is so uncertain.

The encroachment upon private and religious spiritual convictions in our society is truly frightening in terms of the inroads being made. It is the best of times and the worst of times. Yet probably if any of us had a chance we wouldn't trade places with any other generation.

What's going on out there? It's a time of unpredictability and uncertainty.

So we've got to ask another question: what's going on *up there*? That's so key in Isaiah because he gives only a short moment to what's going on out there. It's the crisis that brought him to God. So often it is the case. It's crisis in our life that makes us open and vulnerable to God.

So Isaiah as he begins his manhood as a young man comes to the temple and he gets his eyes off the time and the culture and what is transpiring and picks himself up and gets a vision of God. And that's needed if we're to interpret the data in the world around us we need a fresh vision of God. We're not going to survive this day if we simply look at what is going on in the world. Neither are we going to survive this day if we simply look at what is going on in the church. It's

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a disaster in certain respects to what is happening in some sectors of the body of Christ today. Someone has well said that at times the church reminds them of Noah's ark – if it weren't for the storm outside you couldn't stand the smell inside.

It isn't looking out to the world or to the church but it's looking up. We like Isaiah always need that fresh vision of God. "I saw the Lord," Isaiah said. Where did he see the Lord? Seated on the throne. The human throne. The throne of Uzziah was vacant. But that didn't mean that the real throne was vacant. God, seated on his throne. The Lord reigneth and is clothed with majesty and power. What Isaiah is saying is that very needed element of life. God, I know who you are and in spite of the circumstances around us I know that you are in control. God, you are in control of this age and of the family and of my life.

It is easier to say that at times than it is to actualize it. There are moments I realize that preachers say things that sound like sweet syrup. That sounds so good but you wonder if they're true.

Maybe you've had situations in life where you've had the words "God is in control" choke you. Can it be God is in control?

God, I can't understand what you're up to but I can't throw away the resurrection of Jesus Christ or the truth that he has established himself forever as Lord by his resurrection from the dead. His word is true regardless of this moment I'm feeling subjectively or experiencing.

It's so often that life is like looking at the back side of a watch. You look at what's inside and there's a wheel going this way and a wheel going that way. It looks like no sense is being made at all. Until you turn it over and see that there's rhyme and symmetry and reason that the back part is moving the front part and it makes sense.

So much of our life is spent looking at the back side of things. It is not until that day we see him face to face that we'll understand. In the meantime while waiting for that day it is important that we have a faith in a God who is in control. Sometimes the things that seem to hurt us the most are the very things that bring out the best in us. They are the struggles that help us discover the faith we thought we'd lost, the strength we didn't know we had. The courage to let go of the past and begin again. You need to make the break and begin again. Challenges help us to see who we really are. Where we want to go and what our lives can be if only we have faith and keep on trying.

I get revitalized when I get in the presence of the Lord and find him saying to me in the midst of chaos and turmoil "I am making you! It's on those growing edges of life that the mountains are being formed." Isaiah saw God.

Which brings us to the third question: what's happening in me?

He looked at what was happening around him and what was happening up there. Now Lord, what's happening in me? I make myself available to you. But before he made himself available he saw the flaws in his life. It's when we see God clearly that we clearly begin to see ourselves. Isaiah as matter of fact is one of the most righteous and pure persons in the Old Testament. Yet he has perhaps the most sharply defined personal sense of sin. That's a paradox, isn't it? The guy who was the cleanest feels the worst.

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I've went through the heroes of the faith and found there were skeletons in the closet. But not with Isaiah that we know of. Pure and moral and filled with integrity. Yet when he comes in God's presence he sees the tremendous flaws in his own life.

That's the case when we really see God. We have no ground for boasting. We see the things that are wrong in us. The little things. They may seem little to other people but they become big to us when we see them. The little lusts, the little greed, the little envy, the little anger, the little unforgiveness, the little bitterness, the little self pity. When we see God, we focus away from the faults in others to the faults in ourselves: it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

It's so great to know that we have a gracious Lord who takes something off of his altar to burn away our guilt. God cauterizes our guilt and when he has dealt with our sin and cleansed it away, then he says to us, "Whom will I send and who will go for us?"

To mothers today as well as to fathers and to all of us, God is asking, Will you let me use you? Will you let yourself become available to me? Will you say with Isaiah, whatever, Lord you want of me, I will do it.

That brings us to the last question: What's going to happen in us and through us when we've become aware of what's happening around us and who God is and what the need is in our own life and volunteer to serve God. Then God has a mission and a task for us. He's going to work through us.

As a matter of fact the Lord very rarely lets us know what the future will be when he calls us to follow him. When I was young, I wanted to know what the future held. And God never told me what the future held. And I still don't know what the future holds. But Isaiah was one of those few people God said, Ok you've made yourself available to me. I'm going to tell you what's going to happen.

Based upon what I've read in Isaiah 6 Isaiah got one of the rottenest calls to the ministry a preacher could ever get. To put it in my language: God saying *George I want you to be a pastor. "Oh great Lord. I want to be a pastor. What's in store out there."* And the Lord would say to me, *George when you preach, you'll preach with eloquence and with power but people will go to sleep while you preach. You'll feel and see heads thudding on the pews in front of them. When they're through falling asleep they're going to begin disappearing and going elsewhere. You're not going to pastor a church that grows. In fact, it's not even just going to stay even. When it's all said and done, the congregation you start with you're only going to have at the most ten percent left. That's all. That's my call for your life. Go preach to those stubborn people. Let your preaching confirm the hardness of heart toward me. That's your mission. No great revivals will happen in your lifetime. No world wide waves of the Holy Spirit. Just go preach and be faithful anyway.* I'd have said, "No, Lord, not me! Find somebody else. Get Jonah back or somebody like that. Not me."

Maybe you're finding that life is very hard. Only unlike Isaiah, God did not warn you in advance that it was going to be this hard. I remember the plaque given to me by the church last year, "What happens in you is more important than what happens to you." Then in smaller type, "The same wind that uproots a tree, lifts a bird. The opposing force becomes a lifting force if faced at the right angle." I thought how true that is in life. An adverse wind can kill me or it can cause me to soar. The opposing force can become a lifting force if faced at the right angle. Most

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of us will not only not know what our calling in life is but most of us unlike Isaiah will not be called to speak to a nation, nor will be remember centuries after we have gone.

But all of us still have a call of some kind. This is what the reformers discovered in scripture. That there's no such thing as a called our small group called the clergy. But all of us are called and all of us have a vocational and family call in life – to be a mother, for example is to have a call from God to minister to a child. It may not at times seem glamorous. And it may not lead you to fame. Your kids may not be famous. But from God's point of view there are no little calls because there are no little people and there are no little places.

In college I recall talking to a friend who was getting ready to graduate and I was still an undergraduate. He said "I'm going to go to Kansas City. I'm going to get married and I'm going to teach school and I'm going to live an ordinary life." My spirit rebelled at that and I looked down on him inwardly. How could he listen to all the gospel messages I've listened to and justify his existence on the ground that he was going to live an ordinary life. God's calling us to go out and do something great and nothing less than great will do. You've got to burn out for God. What's this business of living an ordinary life?

Isn't it amazing what thirty years will do to your perspective? I began to realize there's probably no more wonderful thing than to live well and ordinary life which all of us in this room are really doing. Not many of you are famous or wise or powerful according to this world's standards. All of us have a call because there are no little people and no little places.

"Master, where shall I work today? And my love flowed warm and free. And he pointed out a tiny plot, 'Tend that for me.' But I answered quickly, 'Oh no! Not there. Not anyone could see no matter how well my task was done, not that! That little place for me?' But his voice when he spoke was not stern but kind and he answered me tenderly, 'Friend, search that heart of thine. Are you working for me, for them, or for me? Nazareth was just a little place. And so was Calvary.'"

Where you and I are is a little place. Nazareth was a little place but there Mary did her task well. We see in our day what is going on in the world around us but in the midst of seeing it we must see God and then we must see ourselves and ask "God, what will you have me to do?" And then do it.

Father, we thank you for all the mothers that are present here today and we take a moment each of us to thank you for the mothers you gave us. Some of us have mothers who are now in your presence. We thank you for them all. We're so glad to be alive. That they gave us birth in your will. None of us, Lord, have a choice about being born. But all of us have a choice about being born into spiritual life and eternal life. But being your child. All of us had human parents we did not select. But in order to be your child we must select our heavenly Father. So consciously from the heart on this mother's day I pray for anyone here who does not know you personally, that this very day they would open their inner life to you and acknowledge you as their Lord. May this Mother's Day they have a vision of who you are and of your power and grace and love available to them. Then for all of us we pray that this day will hold a day of special meaning as we especially look at the scripture which has been shared this morning as we face the fact that within this great group of people today there are those who are going through difficult times. The earthquake times of life. We ask that in these times you would be Lord to us. That we would not just see what is going on

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around us. But that we would also see you and gain strength from you to live as you would have us to live. May we say with Jesus, I have come to do your will. We ask these things in your name. Amen.