

Belonging (Why We Need the Church)
The Church is a Place to Encounter God through Worship
Isaiah 6:1-8

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(ONE Day)

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Introduction: Why do we need to be part of a local church? Can't I be a Christian and never go to church? Theologically speaking, you can be a Christian and never go to church. Practically speaking, why would you not want to go? The church has so much to offer as you develop into Jesus' disciple.

Sometimes, I hear someone say that belonging to a church or church membership is not a Biblical idea. I respectfully disagree. Consider this:

- The New Testament seems to count folks who were forming themselves into membership units. Acts 2 records the decisions of 3000 on the day of Pentecost and the fact that then the LORD added to their number.
- Acts 6 records that the church held an election of deacons. Doesn't this beg the question of who participated in the vote and who was in the pool of candidates for election?
- 1 Timothy records that there was a list of widows among them with particular needs.
- 1 Corinthians 5 records the instruction of disciplining some of the members.
- Many of Paul's letters records the names of specific people. (Romans 16 for example)

So, this is an important issue. And since it is an important issue, we must be devoted to the church not dabbling in the church or as popular writer Joshua Harris has said in his book Dating the Church.

Over the next weeks, we are going to explore five Biblical reasons of why we need the church. Let me give you the five reasons today and then we will spend this morning examining the first.

1. The Church is the place where I encounter God through worship.
2. The Church is the place where I exercise my spiritual gifts.
3. The Church is the place where I invest in eternity.
4. The Church is the place where I give and receive encouragement.
5. The Church is the place where I give and receive spiritual instruction.

First, the local church is the place where we encounter God through worship. Now, interestingly enough I want to take us to an Old Testament passage this morning, but before that, we read in Acts 2:46, "And every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex..." Where? "The Temple Complex!"

So, let's look at an Old Testament example of the power of encountering God in a public place designated for the purpose of the worship of God.

Text: ¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and His robe filled the temple. ² Seraphim were standing above Him; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another:

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts;
His glory fills the whole earth.

⁴ The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ Then I said:
Woe is me, for I am ruined,
because I am a man of unclean lips
and live among a people of unclean lips,
[and] because my eyes have seen the King,

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷ He touched my mouth [with it] and said:
Now that this has touched your lips,
your wickedness is removed,
and your sin is atoned for.

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying:
Who should I send?
Who will go for Us?

I said:
Here I am. Send me.

Introduction: Isaiah 1:1 indicates that Isaiah preached these prophetic messages contained in the book during the reigns of Uzziah (also called Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The years covered are 740 B.C. to at least 701 B.C. Some would say that there is evidence that Isaiah's prophetic ministry lasted until nearly 680 B.C. We must remind ourselves that this time frame puts us in the midst of the divided kingdom (Israel in the North, Judah in the South). In fact, even though Isaiah's prophecy is focused on Judah in the South, the fall of the Northern kingdom would have happened during his ministry. "Judah faces extinction at the hands of the cruel Assyrians. In this crucial hour of national emergency, God sends Isaiah—a unique man with an unpleasant message. The nation of Judah is rotten to the core and ripe for judgment. Her habitual sins of idolatry, hypocrisy, injustice and corruption have not escaped the notice of her holy God. His righteous wrath will soon fall upon king and commoner alike, that all might learn that the Lord Almighty cannot and will not be mocked."¹

Added to the ongoing sin problem of Judah is the more immediate problem of the death of King Uzziah. Uzziah had reigned as king for 52 years. Uzziah's reign, for the most part, had been a good reign. He had led the country well. As a result, there had been relative calm and peace in the kingdom. His death brought about this sort of national panic of "What now?" (We are not the first generation to worry about how bad things are in a nation.)

I think if you were to ask Isaiah about this time in his life, he would have confessed that he had depended upon the good reign of King Uzziah rather than depended completely upon King Jehovah. In this atmosphere of national and personal panic, Isaiah is in desperate need of a fresh encounter with

¹ *The Daily Walk Bible*, p. 809.

God. That is exactly what he gets as is recorded in Isaiah 6. And, that is exactly what we can experience as we give ourselves to the church.

What happens when we encounter God?

God calms our fears. (1-4)

This was a fearful time for Isaiah. The King had died. The Assyrians were coming. In the midst of these fears, while in the temple, Isaiah meets God. In this encounter, Isaiah recognizes...

God's Sovereignty—The first thing that Isaiah saw about God was His being seated on the throne and His robe. This description is a regal scene showing the absolute reign of the King of Kings. King Uzziah is dead, but Jehovah God, the one true God is very much alive and in control. This is how worship calms our fears. We seem to need that regular reminder that God is on His throne.

God's Holiness—Next, Isaiah saw God's holiness. To say that we have worshipped, but not been led to see God's holiness is foreign to true worship. True worship always ends in seeing God's holiness.

God's Presence—The key term of these first four verses is the idea of filling. His robe filled the temple in verse 1. In verse 2, His glory filled the whole earth. In verse 3, the Temple was filled with smoke. The idea of filling reveals that God's presence is everywhere.

You cannot worry and worship at the same time.

God confronts our failures. (5-7)

In verses 5-7 the emphasis shifts away from God and onto Isaiah. At some point in worship, the emphasis shifts to the recognition of who we are in light of God's holiness.

Recognition of Sin

Step One: Conviction

Step Two: Confession

Recognition of Grace—God doesn't leave us feeling helpless in our sin, but shows us His grace.

God challenges our future. (8)

Notice the Progression of Isaiah's experience:

1. Eyes on Himself
2. Eyes on God
3. Eyes on Himself (but now sin)
4. Eyes on God (but now confession and God's Word)
5. Eyes on Others

We cannot hear from God until we have seen God and been cleansed from our sin.

I am going to challenge you in this series with your view of church membership. Some of you are members, some are regular attending non-members, and some are here for the first time. The challenge is the same. Find a church that causes you to encounter God. If this isn't the one—you have a decision to make. Am I the problem or is the church the problem? The reason that some of you do not hear from God is not this church, but it is you. If you sense that you are not the problem, then the next step is that you need to seek a church where you encounter God.

But here is the plea—if this is going to be your church where you expect to encounter God—give yourself to that. Don't be half-hearted; don't be on the fence. Stop complaining about all that you find wrong with your church. Pray for your church. Love your church. Honestly, seek to make your church a place where you and others can experience fresh encounters with God.

Can this happen every time we meet? Why not?