

June 24

2 Kings 15 and 2 Chronicles 26-27
Isaiah 1, 4, 5, 6

Hello, I'm Lori Eccleston and today I'm joined with Deb Beck, Adult/Outreach Ministry Administrative Assistant and Sandy Carroll, Worship/Music Administrative Assistant. Sandy and Deb are a great support to me personally and they do a wonderful job serving on staff at Christ Community Church.

Today you read II Kings 15 and II Chronicles 26 -27. If today you came to the conclusion that you are no longer even going to try to keep the kings of the Northern dynasty straight because of how quickly they assassinate one another and change dynasties, I have a bit of good news. There will be a little more to read about Hoshea this week, but the last Israelite king you met in II Kings 15 is the last Israelite king you will need to remember, because Hoshea is the last king the Northern Kingdom ever had.

In Judah, Amaziah was succeeded on the throne by Azariah who also had two names, II Chronicles calls him by the more common one, Uzziah. And once again we are faced with what by now has become a frightening pattern. He starts well, he keeps going, but he finishes badly. It begins to look as though the godly life is a little like a long distance run. Many start looking very well but the really important question is how do they finish. Like so many of predecessors and successors in history, Uzziah turns in a disappointing performance -- and spends the last years of his life living in splendid isolation -- a leper, bearing the consequences of his sin against God.

Uzziah is not the first person to contract leprosy as a judgment for prideful rebellion against God and his anointed servants. Exactly the same thing happened to Miriam when she rebelled against the authority of Moses. But in that case after Moses prayed for her, she was cleansed. But in this case there is no reversal. Perhaps the difference is to be explained by the fact that he, unlike Miriam, did not truly repent of his sin. I do not know why healing did not come to Uzziah. I am, therefore, all the more thankful for the fifth chapter of James which seems to say that if my sickness is the result of a judgment of God for sins that I have committed, then the confession of sin coupled with true repentance and the faithful prayers of the elders will bring healing to my body. Please note that the Bible never once says that all sickness is the result of sin, but sometimes it is, and in those instances confession and prayer are the best -- indeed the only medicine that can help.

The most famous verse in the passage we ready today is Isaiah 1:18. Traditionally, these words have been read as a gracious invitation from God to repent, coupled with a promise to forgive.

Toward the end of chapter 1, God pronounced the judgment that will come upon Judah. There is an important lesson here for all of us that we can't afford to miss. All of us are involved from time to time in situations in which discipline has to be administered. In the church, in our families, on the job -- people do wrong things --

even malicious things, and need to be disciplined. In every single human situation the goal of discipline needs always to be, not revenge, but restoration.

Remember Hosea? His life and in particular his marriage was an acted-out parable for the people of Israel to whom he was sent. Guess what? So was Isaiah's. His purifying, transforming encounter with God was also an acted-out parable, demonstrating exactly what Israel would need if ever she would become the faithful servant of God. Well, we are, as you might have guessed, a lot like Israel, and we need what Isaiah experienced -- a transforming encounter with the Holy One of Israel.

If ever there was a man of integrity, it was Isaiah the son of Amoz. He was a whole man, a together type of fellow, considered by his contemporaries as the most righteous man in the nation, a paragon of virtue. Then he caught one sudden glimpse of a holy God and in that single moment all of his self-esteem was shattered. In a brief second he was exposed, laid naked beneath the gaze of the absolute standard of holiness. As long as Isaiah could compare himself to other mortals, he was able to sustain a lofty opinion of his own character, but the instant he measured himself by the ultimate standard, he was destroyed -- morally and spiritually annihilated. He was undone, he came apart, his sense of integrity collapsed.

That is what happens when we come face to face with God. Isaiah was groveling on the floor; every nerve fiber in his body was trembling. He was looking for a place to hide, praying that somehow the earth would cover him or the roof the Temple would fall on him, anything to get him out from under the holy gaze of God. But there was nowhere to hide. He was naked and alone before God. He had no Eve to comfort him, no fig leaf to conceal him, it was pure, moral anguish -- the kind that rips the heart out of a man and tears his soul to pieces. Guilt, guilt, guilt, relentless guilt screamed from every pore. But the holy God is also a God of grace. He refused to allow his servant to continue on his belly without comfort. He took immediate steps to cleanse the man and restore his soul. He commanded one of the seraphim to jump into action and the angelic creature moved swiftly, flying to the altar with tongs and from the burning fire he took a glowing coal too hot to touch even for an angel, and flew to Isaiah. He pressed the white-hot coal to the lips of the prophet and seared them. The lips are the most sensitive part of the human flesh, the meeting point of the kiss. Here Isaiah felt the holy flame burning in his mouth. The smell of burning flesh filled his nostrils, but that sensation was dulled by the excruciating pain of the heat. This was a severe mercy, a painful act of cleansing. Isaiah's wound was being cauterized. The dirt in his mouth was being burned away; he was refined by holy fire. In this divine act of cleansing, Isaiah experienced a forgiveness that went beyond the purification of his lips. He was cleansed throughout, forgiven to the core, but not without the awful pain of repentance. He went beyond cheap grace and the easy utterance, 'I'm sorry.' He was in mourning for his sin, overcome with moral grief and God sent an angel to heal him. His sin was taken away; his dignity remained intact. His guilt was removed but his humanity was not insulted. The conviction of sin he felt was constructive. His was no cruel and unusual punishment. A second of burning flesh on the lips brought a healing that would extend to eternity. In a moment the disintegrated prophet was whole again. His mouth was purged and he was clean."

One thing is certain -- God wants faithful servants. We cannot be those kinds of servants until we too have seen a Holy God and been changed.