

RE-READING ISAIAH 6:1-8 IN CULTIVATING THE ART AND SCIENCE OF WORSHIP THROUGH 3C'S

By

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Introduction

Worship is primal in people's experience of the numinous. In fact, human beings are relational beings and as such try to relate to higher being through worship. Worship is a way of expression of love, dependence, devotion, loyalty to the almighty. Worship is like a two way traffic which is purely interactive, dialogical, with a lot of dynamism, remarkable and spectacular experience of the worshipper.

Worship is all about relationship that involves fellowshipping, appeasement and interaction. It is an affective relationship where worshipper is being influenced positively. It is about paying homage to the Supreme Being totally relying and depending upon the Supreme Being's largesse and beneficiaries.

Worship is both an art and science. It should be seen as art because it has theory(ies) that govern(s) it. It is science because it seeks to utilize the forces of nature to benefit humankind. Loren Wilkinson argues in his article "Science, Art, and Worship" that science rather than being an autonomous discipline that can survive without relationship to other spheres; worship as a science should best be seen as part of a much bigger, enmeshed world. As such, science should lead all to wonder about the broader nature of the world and to worship the One that created it and upholds it by power of his might.¹ David Clayton posted on January 27, 2015 an article titled "Scientific Evidence that Man is made to Worship God?" describes how recent studies have shown that those who attend religious services regularly are happier than those who do not. It is in lieu of this that he submitted that "The worship of God is the 'summit' of human life. In other words, the purpose of human existence, to which all other activities and goal ultimately conform if we want to be happy, is the worship of God."² It is revealed that there is truth in what those who worship God believe about Him. The religious ceremony is part of the expression of a relationship with God, and it is the flourishing of that relationship which causes greater happiness.³ Today, it is no gainsaying or exaggeration to say that science is actually corroborating the scriptural assertions. In fact, many scientific discoveries point to the existence of the Supernatural Being who holds all things in place and position by the power of His might.⁴

Worship as a science enunciates principles, investigates the laws of thought and language, and classifies its facts and results. More so, as a science, it is guided by set of principles or laws. As an art, it teaches what application these principles should have, and establishes their soundness by showing their practical value in the elucidation of the more

difficult aspects of worship. The art of worship thus cultivates and establishes a valid worship procedure. Science is governed by set of rules and laws, and what are called ‘scientific laws’ and ‘laws of nature’ are really *divine laws* created by the Governor and Sustainer of the universe - the Lord Jesus Christ. *The Word for Today* devotional of October 1-7, 2016 vividly pointed out the scientific evidence of God’s activities in creation and its sustainability.⁵

The personal experience of Isaiah after the death of king Uzziah is a good paradigm that can be used in offering a qualitative worship either corporate or personal, in public or private. The 3C’s of conviction, cleansing and call can be explored in bringing out the truth or experience of a true Christian worship.

The work would explore multi-dimensional methodology using historical cum exegetical and hermeneutical approaches. It would look at the passage in its historical/cultural context, literary context, content and theological importance of the passage to Christian worship.

Historical and Cultural Context of Isaiah 6:1-8

The historical setting under which this passage is located is within the period of the eighth century B.C. (c. 700 onward down to the period after the exile c. 500).⁶ The book of prophet Isaiah spans through 740 B.C. down to the period after the exile c. 500 B.C. and to the final shaping of the book in c. 200 B.C.⁷ The book of Isaiah spans through three major observable periods. The first period is that which prophet Isaiah was personally involved. This covers two crises in Judah’s history: the Syro-Ephraimites’ war during the rulership of Ahaz in c. 734-732 B.C.; Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah in c. 701 B.C. The second period is that of the second Isaiah, “the unknown prophet of the exile.”⁸ This covers chapters 40-55 when the people were in exile. The third period was reflected in the prophecies in chapters 56-66 where attempts were made in re-establishing and restoring the Jewish community in Jerusalem.

This book records the historical situations and visions of Prophet Isaiah. The book was written at a time Assyria crushed the northern kingdom, Israel, and deported the entire population leaving behind the weaklings. The tiny nation, Judah, was also invaded by Sennacherib but however survived. This was the political situation of Judah – a critical and dangerous period, under which Isaiah wrote his prophetic message. Isaiah wrote about absolute holiness of God, his uniqueness leads Isaiah concluded that there is no other god besides the LORD.

The book bears witness to God’s communication with His disobedient people. The book expounds the Israel’s refusal to heed God’s will occasioned by their rebellion, pride, and self-will to establishing government on their own terms. The prophetic genre used is both poetic and narrative in its approach. This genre meets the basic requirements of prophetic literature that speaks with the Word of God about election and covenant, rebellion and judgment, compassion and redemption, and consummation.⁹

The purpose of the book of Isaiah “was to be read in the temple services of the Jewish community. These texts were to illustrate, and to help the people to understand, the teachings of the Law as recorded in the Torah.”¹⁰ Isaiah wrote at such “these critical and dangerous times... calling for spiritual and moral renewal.”¹¹ God’s intention for Isaiah for writing the

message is that he should confront God's people showing their utter sinfulness and negligence of his ways – “but for the purpose of bringing a message of healing. The people have departed from the life-enhancing ways as stipulated in the (Holy Writ) - Torah. They are walking the paths of injustice. What will indeed be sharp, even harsh, words from Isaiah are nonetheless meant to bring a message of hope, of the possibilities for a return to wholeness.”¹² In essence, Isaiah's was to bring holistic healing to the people.

The first six chapters of the book show God's judgment brought to bear upon Israel and Jerusalem. Israel struggles to achieve political control fighting against God through fragrant and constant disobedience. Isaiah 6 climaxes the experience of prophet Isaiah despite the troubles of Judah as recorded in Isaiah 1-5. Chapter 6 bridges the gap and the Lord of hosts becomes the Holy One of Israel (10:17; 12:6; 29:19; 30:11). It was natural for Chapter 6 to come after chapters 1-5 for it shows its dependence upon chapters 1-5 that record accusations against the people's unwillingness to obey God.¹³

The prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, is said to be an assumed author¹⁴ of the Book of Isaiah who lived and worked in Jerusalem from about 750 to 700 B.C. little is known about Isaiah and all that is known about him is contained in the Book of Isaiah because it is not explicitly stated in the Scripture. Isaiah 8:16 seems to suggest Isaiah as the author to “bind up the testimony of God.”¹⁵

This narrative is dated and belonged to the eighth century period because of the numerous historical references throughout the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah 1-6 briefly but broadly introduced the book; it warns against the wickedness of the people of Judah around 745-740 B.C. before political danger comes their way.¹⁶ Specifically, Uzziah's death is dated around 742 B.C. by Bright,¹⁷ but it is hard to fix his reign because it is a shared co-regent with Jotham (see 2 Chron. 6:21). Most scholars think that Isaiah 6 is in a perfect place to bridge chapters 1-5 with 7 forward in a certain chronological order, however, there are some scholars contesting the placement of Chapter 6 where it is placed.¹⁸

The account of Isaiah's commission is a vivid account of his obedience to God and the purging of his sin (Isaiah 6:1-8). This is a direct contrast to the Israelites disobedience to God in plunging them from blindness and deafness a direct result of their sinful nature against God.¹⁹ It suffices also to note that there are fresh collections of prophecies beginning with Isaiah 6 the group of prophesies present in Isaiah 7:1-9:7. This group of prophecies is connected with the historical setting of the coalition of Syro-Ephraimitic invasion culminated in the Messianic identification in Isaiah 9:1-6.²⁰

Literary Context of Isaiah 6:1-8

Generally, Isaiah's style of writing is said to transcend all other Hebrew prophets. He profusely employed striking images to pass across his message to his readers. There is not a paragraph where there is no some sort of using simile or metaphor. This gives some poetical enrichment to the form of expression. Metaphors used are remarkably incredible. For instance, Assyria is being described as a swarm of bees (7:18), a raging stream (8:7-8), a lion (5:29), a rod (10:5), etc. Among the beautiful metaphors is “The people who walked in darkness... upon them the light has shown (9:2), etc. There is dramatic representation used to have an appreciable effect upon the liveliness of the composition; examples are 3:7-17; 47:7, 10; 63, etc. The use of antithesis, a characteristic of Hebrew poetry is pointed and telling; example is

Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson
They shall be like wool.

Isaiah employed the play on words as it is characteristics of Hebrew literature. He made an effective use of rhetorical amplification and its wonderful varieties of style.²¹

Literarily, Isaiah 6 made use of a first-person pronoun, its event can be dated and it is a monologue narrative that connects chapters 1-4 in a bridge with chapters 7-35.²² This is the second time that Isaiah claims divine authority because he had earlier claimed divine authentication in chapter 1:1. In this section, he declares the spiritual condition, a kind of desolation that will come against the land.²³ Thematically, Isaiah 6:1-4 describes Isaiah's vision of the LORD God when he had a face-to-face encounter. Isaiah experiences a sense of unworthiness in 6:5-7 and receipt of God's commission in 6:8-13. This is a structure reminiscent and similar to other Old Testament call stories. The content of which usually contains divine confrontation (6:1-2), introductory word (6:3-7), commission (6:8-10), objection (6:11a) and reassurance (6:11b-13).²⁴ There is curiosity and a call for concern why Isaiah's call to minister to the rebellious nation comes in the middle of the book. There have been a "debate through its curious lateness,"²⁵ however, "when one considers chapter 6 as the beginning of a fresh series of prophecies independent of chapters 1-5, but bridging towards the next set of prophecies, Isaiah's call to minister to Israel becomes heightened and critical to the thematic development of the book."²⁶ Matthew Henry sees the episode here as Isaiah "having only a virtual and tacit commission; but here ... have him solemnly ordained and set apart to the prophetic office by a more express or explicit commission... he (Isaiah perhaps) began to think of giving it up, and therefore God saw it fit to renew his commission... in such a manner as might excite and encourage his zeal and industry in the execution of it."²⁷ S. Paul Schilling opined that this passage might be added "in explanation and validation of his (Isaiah) message, the account of his call."²⁸

Exegetical Analysis of Isaiah 6:1-8

Conviction in Worship (Isa. 6:1-4)

In Isaiah 6:1a, there is an announcement that King Uzziah has died. The event culminating in the death of the king was not mentioned. This opening verse of the death of King Uzziah really affects Isaiah. This may be as a result of the fact that he was the only king that Isaiah had known personally; in addition to this is the growing sense of doom being built up from the Assyrian threat by Tiglath-Pileser III's ascendancy. These might have affected Isaiah greatly.²⁹ Isaiah must have been devastated with his confidence in the king smashed as a result of King Uzziah succumbing to shame, stupor, leprosy and finally death. He was certainly disturbed and worried with the stability of his homeland with the demise of her king.³⁰ Isaiah must have been aware of the warnings of the other 8th century prophets like Hosea and Amos (Amos 1:4, 5, 23; cf. Amos 2:6; 5:10, 11). In 2 Chronicles 26 there have been earlier warnings to the economic and military successful exploits of King Uzziah and his people that their sins would curry and attract punishment from God.³¹ It is important to note that prophet Isaiah saw his king getting rotten as he succumbed to the leprosy of uncleanness. At the king's death, Isaiah saw himself standing before the presence of God's court. It was the king that died but the Lord still stands and reigns on his throne. He saw supernatural visions that reveal the righteous and triune holy Lord of hosts sitting upon his throne, lifted high above the degeneration of human depravity that was approaching the land of Judah (vv. 1, 8). It suffices to note what Isaiah saw. What did he see? *yn "±doa] -*

ta, ha, ór>a, w" and he (Isaiah) saw the Lord. It was not the Yahweh (*hwḥy*) - (the essence of God) that he saw but the Adonai (*YHWH ±dōa*) - (his dominion) because no one sees Yahweh and lives. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne of glory before which everyone must worship – this is a throne of government (under which we must be subject) and it is a throne of grace where all can come boldly. This is a throne that is high and elevated above all competition and contradiction.³²

Judah had experienced great prosperity under King Uzziah, but unfortunately stormy clouds have started gathering with vague fears beguiling the people's hearts. The king had become leprosy and eventually died. Isaiah bewildered and puzzled peered into the unknown future through dark moment. When he saw God, he clearly saw himself and Judah in the light of God's assessment of them.

There is a direct link of the opening perceptions of Isaiah in seeing the Lord sitting on his throne to where he heard his voice.³³ These words have direct bearing on Isaiah's seeing and hearing the Lord in the temple which interconnect with the message given him by the Lord to deliver to His people in "be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving" (v. 9b).

In Isaiah 6:1b, Isaiah described the Lord's throne as "high and lifted up." The imagery description here is a replica of the practice of the earthly kings. The earthly king's throne has always been treated with grandeur. In 1 Kings 10:18-20, Solomon's throne was described as being "placed at the summit of 'six steps,' so that its occupant was 'high and lifted up' above all his courtiers."³⁴ Each of these descriptions 'high' and 'lifted' differs from one another, though both can be represented by either Hebrew word that holds similar meaning. Isaiah purposely describes the place of the Lord with these separate, purposefully chosen Hebrew words ~*WY* this is a qal participle masculine singular from ~*WY* - highly exalted,³⁵ *af 'n*" (is niphil participle masculine singular absolute from *af 'n*" – he lifted high, raised up high, even more highly exalted).³⁶ The grammatical function of niphil is a passive action of an active verb. It was the throne that was high and also lifted. The Lord was sitting upon such lofty throne. This is to express the separation of the full glorious presence of the Lord rising above those who stood in His presence in the holy place. It should also be noted that the spiritually purified Seraphim stood above the throne. This is reminiscent of the tabernacle's holy of holies, where the image of two cherubim angels spread wings that shelter the ark of the covenant of the Lord. The ark really contained the two stone tablets of law. The filling of a cloud of glory from LORD God's presence in the midst of the congregation of Israel represents the arch overseeing of God's sovereignty over all nations (1 Kings 8:6-11).³⁷ The image of his train or robe filling the temple talks about his utter dominance.

There is a deep contrast in Isaiah 6 from the start as Isaiah stands between a degenerating homeland with a dead king and in the presence of the throne room that was filled with the glory of the Lord. The train of the Lord drops down to His temple making contact with the human world from the heavenly place. It is not only the differences between Isaiah's world and the Lord that his words reveal. The connection the Lord holds true for all humanity. This would be made possible through the Temple of God that will soon be raised again as Cyrus the builder's arrival is announced in Isaiah 44:28. Isaiah 6 bridges the fallen state of Judah with the raising of a temple connecting God's people to the Lord with His throne in Heaven.³⁸

In Isaiah 6:2, 3, there is an echoing of three-fold of God's "Holy, Holy, Holy" nature by the six-winged, burning Seraphim, ~yp̄i' r̄f . – meaning the burning ones.³⁹ These Seraphim fly above the majestic, luminous Lord upon His throne. They revealed the Omnipresence of God. His glory keeps on shining forth as their instantaneous and uncontrollable shout outs of praise to declare His glory. There must be a connection of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6:2, 3 with the similar four beasts with six wings in Revelations 4:8 that shout "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." It should be observed that John's supernatural visions recorded in Revelations 4 really re-echoed the atmosphere surrounding the majestic throne of God. Isaiah's supernatural vision of God in the temple elaborated the full spectacle of God's glory; it adds a depth of visualization that is of a first person report of a living firsthand witness.⁴⁰

The rendition of the Seraphim utterances is reminiscence of God's "infinite perfections in himself...he is the Lord of hosts, of their hosts; and one of his glorious attributes, his holiness. God's power was spoken of twice (Ps. 62:11), but his holiness thrice, holy, holy, holy...The superlative excellence of God's holiness, above that of the purest creatures. He is holy, thrice holy, infinitely holy, originally, perfectly, and eternally so."⁴¹ It seems Isaiah becomes enthralled, got caught up and was really transformed through the words of unending praise from the Seraphim, as if his very spirit is raised high to join them in the praise of His Lord. However, upon realization of his condition of his unclean lips (v. 5), Isaiah then plunged into the depth of despair upon realization of his sinfulness and unworthiness.

Isaiah 6:4 reveals the shaking of the doors post and the smoke filling the house. This is reminiscent of God's presence whenever he visits (see Exod. 19:16-19; 1 Kings 19:11b-12). Some scholars felt that this was a token of terror - the post of the doors shaking and smoke filling the house as a result of one of the angels speaking. The fiery nature of the Seraphim is linked with the theophany of the LORD God as revealed in the thunder and lightning in the Old Testament, especially in Psalms 18:8-9 and Baal's seven thunders and lightning.⁴² Other secular scholars do make a connection of the account of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6:2-4 with the Egyptian Uraei (winged sphinxes), symbols of human and divine kingship.⁴³ A view that often leads to wrong and false conclusion that the thunder and lightning recorded in Psalm 24, Habakkuk 3:9 and Isaiah 6 are a personification of a god nature that is paralleled from a Baal mythology in the Ugaritic text.⁴⁴

McFarland cautioned that in doing biblical exegesis of Isaiah 6, one must avoid the typological connection of Psalm 18:9-10 to Isaiah 6. In Psalm 18:9-10, the fact of "the LORD God thunders and shakes the foundations of the earth, that smoke comes out of his nostrils, and the fire from his mouth devours in the poetic tone that captures the deliverance of a believer by God does not represent the shaking of the door posts by a Seraphim."⁴⁵ It should be noted that God is not the one rendering the praise to the Lord at his throne in Isaiah 6. The observation of the post shaking and smoke filling the room are not literally representative of God's deliverance. It should, however, be noted that there are several different types of smoke being associated with the heavenly altar (see Rev. 8:4 and 15:8). In Revelation 9, there is a kind of smoke from the abyss where the locusts' demons arise. This smoke is the proof of the eternal torment of the prostitute of Babylon and the beast's followers is in Revelation 14:11; 18:18.⁴⁶ It suffices to note that the smoke in Isaiah 6:4 is the purification associated with God's altar that links to the power and glory of God as captured. It is clearly related to this type of smoke described in Revelation 8:4 and 15:8.

Cleansing/consecration: an Essential Ingredient of Worship (Isa. 6:5-7)

Isaiah has a deeper awareness that penetrates his humanness to a deeper spiritual awareness of his inward part as the experience he had of the shaken door posts and smoke-filled house had really impacted him (Isaiah 6:4). The vision of God he saw produced a deep feeling of unworthiness. God is of purer eyes and he cannot behold iniquity (see Hab. 1:13). In fact, the heavens are not even pure before him (Job 15:15). When mortal man who is never wholly purged from sin while on earth cannot, but shrink from contact with the absolutely holy God.⁴⁷ It is at that very significant moment that Isaiah cries out in agony, “Woe is me! For I am undone” is the highest level of his encounter. It was at his realization of his unworthiness that his sins were able to be purged and his iniquity removed. Isaiah had been given supernatural visions of the glorious Lord sitting upon His throne. He saw odd creatures with six wings standing over the throne; he was able to hear their praises to the Lord, he is able to recognize the Lord and understood all that were going on. He was helpless and passive until the shaken of the door posts and the filling of the house with smoke. This is because up to that moment Isaiah was highly contaminated by sin and for him to fully participate in this supernatural unfolding event tasking place through his very eyes in the vision.

The Psalmist quipped in Psalm 24:3 “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who shall stand in his holy place?” He provided the answer in verse 4 that “He that has clean hands, and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” If these were the requirements necessary to stand before the Lord God almighty, then it is apparent that Isaiah meets all of these requirements, or he would not have been qualified to stand in the holy throne room of the Lord. In spite of the privilege he had to stand before the presence of the Lord. He suffered a dirtiness of unclean lips because he dwelt in the midst of people of unclean lips. It is noteworthy to see that Isaiah never shifted blames on others but claimed personal responsibility for his sin. It was not the people he associated with that were the cause of his predicament. They also suffered from this sinful condition anyway. Self-accountability most certainly is made possible through self-evaluation. This is because of the purifying smoke that penetrates his whole being, and the personal and powerful encounter with the great King, the Lord of hosts, that brings repentance as he was too ashamed to view himself before the triune holy God.⁴⁸ No wonder Paul wrote that godly sorrow leads one to repentance that brings salvation (see 2 Cor. 7:9-10).

Isaiah 6:6-7 reverberate with the theme of cleansing, purification, consecration and forgiveness. This section of the passage records the cleansing of Isaiah's lips as he was touched by a hot, fiery coal held by the tongs of one Seraph that sears the impurities, takes the iniquity away, and purges his sin. At this juncture, Isaiah painfully became so much aware of his frailty, humanness and a being of “unclean lips living among people of unclean lips” (6:5). The cleansing operation took place only after the declaration of his unworthiness. It was at that point that one of the seraphim touched his mouth with a live coal and declared to him that his guilt has been removed and that his sin has been blotted out (6:7).

The angelic beings that surrounded the throne of God ministered to Isaiah in that heavenly encounter. One of them flew to Isaiah with **הַP' c . r I** (*rits'pah*) - (glowing stone or coal)⁴⁹ a live (burning) coal taken from the altar with the tongs. The imagery of the live coal implies and means that the coal must have been still hot and burning. The severity of its hotness even forced the angelic being to use the tongs to take the live coal from the altar. The burning live coal is a replica of the fire that must be constantly burning around the altar.

This altar could be akin to a man's heart that must stay continually being purified. The altar as used in the passage must be heavenly version of the altar of incense that was set before the holy of holies in the tabernacle of God set up by Moses in the wilderness (Exod. 30:1-10). One must be aware and know that the earthly tabernacle God instructed Moses to build was made after the pattern of that heavenly reality (see Exod. 25:9). It suffices to note that the throne is exclusively for God, the King of kings and the LORD of lords. This is the place where God rules and reigns. The altar is where God's children find cleansing and purging from sin. No wonder Christ teaches that the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart (see Mk. 7:20-22). A man's heart is the centre of all activities. Whatever is seen in the outward is a reflection of the internal being (heart). It is expedient never to run into confusing the two (live coal and altar) with the issue of fire and the heart! "The fire was taken from the altar, to intimate that it was divine or heavenly; for the law forbade any strange fire to be brought to it...."⁵⁰

The effect of the hot burning/live coal on Isaiah's lip caused his sin to be burned away; the fire of judgment was applied to his place of sin. This was really a divine or spiritual transaction. This same principle applied in regard to Jesus' work on Calvary for the sin of mankind. When Jesus took the sin of the whole world on Calvary, he was burned with the fire of God's judgement. But Jesus was unharmed with the fire of God's judgement because he was holy and righteous. The resultant effect of this is mankind's sin was burned. So, mankind is saved from the power of sin but today only grapple/battle with the presence of sin.

Two things happened to Isaiah. It is interesting to observe that Isaiah speaks of two results of the touching of his lips with the hot burning coal. First, ⁵¹ *^n<ëwO[]* ("oneka) - his iniquity, guilt, punishment "*YS 'w>* (*w^esar*) - and turned aside, turned off, stopped/ceased to be, taken away."⁵² The second thing that happened to Isaiah was "*^ßt . aJ 'x ; w>* (*w^echatta 'ka |*) - and your sin (*נַאֲפָתָה*) [*chatta'ah*]; *rP")kut.* (*t^equpar*) - this is pual imperfect second feminine singular verb meaning atoned for, completely obliterated, covered up, purged."⁵³ It is necessary to know what happens in the spiritual realm when it comes to the issue of forgiveness. Considering the syntax of the verb, pual is not an ordinary action; it is an intensive action; so, it is an action carried out with utmost urgency. It is a passive action, so the subject had no active participation in the action for it was performed on him. So, the issue of forgiveness is purely an action performed on the subject and more so performed with divine uttermost urgency. It was a complete obliteration (erasure) of sin.

It is necessary to observe Scott who quoted Engnell in his exposition and sees a parallel between the touching of Isaiah's lip with the live coal with the "mouth purification" rites of the Akkadian and Egyptian royal rituals. It is symbolically cultic, where stone conveys holiness of the altar and purifies the unclean lips. This event awakened Isaiah's consciousness of his real and dreadful condition of his moral uncleanness (his state of unworthiness) especially as he encountered God's nature and power of holiness. The touching of Isaiah's lip with the live coal represents contact with the holiness of God and the immediate experience of divine act of forgiveness.⁵⁴

David Guzik quoting Spurgeon said

The effect of that live coal will be to fire the lip with heavenly flame. 'Oh,' says one man, 'a flaming coal will burn the lip so that the man cannot speak at all.' That is just

how God works with us; it is by consuming the fleshly power that he inspires the heavenly might. Oh let the lip be burnt, let the fleshly power of eloquence be destroyed, but oh for that live coal to make the tongue eloquent with heaven's flame; the true divine power which urged the Apostles forward, and made them conquerors of the whole world.⁵⁵

Cleansing and consecration are essential ingredients of worship. This is all about purging, removing the impediment that could be across the way of the worshipper before God. Isaiah's experience and encounter with the numinous should be the norm whenever people come to worship before the almighty God. Isaiah's experience goes beyond normal Old Testament's sacrifices' experience which is externally motivated and mediated, his experience is internally motivated. He had his conscience purged and cleansed. He was no longer bound by guilt to his past and no longer overwhelmed with the sense of inadequacy and unworthiness. His past sins are gone and now ready for service in God's court/vineyard.

Call and Commission as Response to Worship - Isaiah 6:8

The very moment Isaiah met with the LORD, having been convicted of his sin, and cleansed from its guilt, he was then ready for God's service. The immediate and utmost response to the living God (after atonement) in worship is service (see Heb. 9:14). He heard the voice of the Lord. There is a vacuum that needed to be filled. It requires a ready volunteer to take up the assignment. It is only the endowed forgiven one that would be accepted and qualified to take up the task. God would not honour anyone with a place of service for him, those who were not in gracious relations with him. The voice of Lord spoke up and was heard by Isaiah. This implies that only God chooses and approves the workman found in the endowed Isaiah. It is only the ones divinely endowed with self-consecration that respond to God's service.⁵⁶

It is worthwhile to note that the call of God many times starts with a question that demands an answer, "Who shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah's purged, clean lips answers "Here am I; send me." It is interesting to note the phrase "then said I, here [am] I, send me" for he who before thought himself undone, finished and unworthy to be employed in the service of God is now ready for the divine assignment. Then God commissions Isaiah as His mouthpiece. God's message/command is simple but sublime: "Go, and tell this people." The message will affect God's People, both the Jews and later the Christians. God warns of the impending desolation consequent upon His people's spiritual obstinacy for they would be punished for their sin of insubordination. He was now having a discovery and application of pardoning grace that was freely offered, he felt compelled to reciprocal the kind gesture of God, having seen all impediments removed, he therefore offered himself to God for service. The true nature and effect of an application of pardon is witnessed here and it gives a man freedom and boldness in the presence of God. More so, it stimulates a ready and cheerful obedience to God's will, and engages him with the utmost eagerness, that is, cheerful readiness in his service. This is akin to the doctrine of free and full pardon by the blood of Christ from being a licentious (unrestrained by law or morality) doctrine.⁵⁷

Matthew Poole considers the grammatical functions of the pronoun "I" and "us" in "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us" to deliver the following message? The change of the number, I and us, is very remarkable; and both being meant of one and the same Lord, do sufficiently intimate a plurality of persons in the Godhead. Here am I; send me: God's last and great favour to him did both encourage and oblige him to be forward in God's service.

The singular number being used by Yahweh is the most sublime and awful declarations. Besides this strange use of the plural number on the part of God himself, plural names (**אֱלֹהִים 'elohîym, אֱלֹנִים 'adônâyîm**) are frequently given to him by the writers of the Bible; the instances in which these names occur in the singular form, are the exceptions. The name usually rendered "God" in the English Bible, is almost invariably plural - **אֱלֹהִים 'elohîym**, Gods.⁵⁸

In Barnes' observations he said the use of the plural pronouns "we and us," as applicable to God, occurs several times in the Old Testament. Such a use of the name of God in the plural is very common, but it is not clear that there is a reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. In some cases, it is evident that it cannot have such a reference, and that no "argument" can be drawn from the use of that plural form in favour of such a doctrine. This is called by grammarian's *pluralis excellentice*, or the plural form indicating majesty or honour. It is, in all countries, used in reference to kings and princes; and as God often represents himself as a "king" in the Scriptures, and speaks in the language that was usually applied to kings in oriental countries; it should be observed that no argument can be drawn from expressions like these in defence of the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁹ So, this reference "I" and "us" is a reference to one and same God. For God is not consulting with any heavenly cabinet/council.

Isaiah's call or as the case may be "a renewal-of-call" comes not in the form of a divine imperative but rather in the form of a question. Incidentally and even interestingly, this is not a question that is even addressed to Isaiah. Rather, it was an occasion of God speaking to the heavenly beings in which Isaiah was privileged to overhear the conversation. It is worthy of note to observe that Isaiah's response was as if he was overwhelmed with gratitude at having been forgiven and permitted to live. Isaiah cannot help but respond positively, volunteering to go and quipped: "Here am I; send me!" one cannot but observe the immediacy and enthusiasm of Isaiah's positive response. This represents a marked departure and a remarkable contrast with several other call narratives in the Bible; example is Jeremiah's call (see Jer. 1:4-10), whose hesitancy recalls Moses' call (see Exod. 4:10-13) who were full with excuses and hesitation. However, in Isaiah's case, there is no hesitation and there are no excuses and contingencies.

According to John Gill he observed that Isaiah who before this time thought himself to be undone, unworthy and useless and of no value to be employed in the service of God now sees otherwise. He was now ready for the divine service. On account of his new encounter with God is now having a discovery and application of pardoning grace, he freely offers himself to God. This shows what really happens whenever there is a true encounter with God, experiencing the true nature and effect of an application of pardon; it gives a man freedom and boldness in the presence of God. It stimulates a readiness and cheerful obedience to his will, and engages him with the utmost swiftness in his service. It is necessary to note that the doctrine of free and full pardon by the blood of Christ is far from being a licentious doctrine.⁶⁰

Theological Significance of Isaiah 6:1-8 to Christian Worship

Isaiah 6 is filled with many theological significance and applications for Christian worship today. God must be the focus and attention of all worshippers. This is because in spite of magnificent description of the Seraphim, the Lord was their focus. No matter how marvellous is a person's experience when worship before God, even no matter the great feat

one may have accomplished in God's vineyard. It is even possible that marvellous deeds like some may have beautiful visions; the lesson is that all eyes must be fixed on God for he deserves all worshippers' attention.

It is worthy to note Isaiah's dirtied lips; this is a portrayal of the state of sinfulness and filthiness in human beings. It shows human frailty and depravity of human souls. Whenever anyone comes before the presence of God, man's sinfulness becomes more obvious. The passage shows the fact that no matter how a person tries to practice piety whenever one dwells in the midst of others whose lives are full of sinfulness; there is no how one will not be contaminated by their sinful lifestyles as the dirty condition is apt to come upon even the most devoted to God.

The process of spiritual awareness, understanding and eventual cleansing is critical upon the entire being – eyes, ears and heart. These are three most senses that are easily affected and contamination upon man. Alas, all these are under the control of God. God's grace opens one's eyes, ears and heart for the spiritual messages to be received. The disobedient ones close down their senses to prevent them from receiving God's teachings and grace. The Lord Jesus Christ is fully aware of this condition that is brought upon the disobedient, and patterns His teachings to His followers to give them new spiritual understanding without revealing the same to those God has brought stubbornness upon.⁶¹

Isaiah 6 is filled with deep spiritual insights and teachings that provide believers with understanding of the holiness of God, His will for His People, and the desolation that disobedience to Him brings. Correct exegesis gives Christians a deep understanding of Scripture, especially in the areas of spiritual knowledge and understanding importance in the redemptive process that brings salvation.

Isaiah receives his prophetic call in the temple while worshipping. He would be bold in bringing a message of justice, equity and fairness. His message would touch politics and brings about social transformation. Worthy to note is the fact of receiving his calling and direction as a worshiping member of the community of Israel where he ministered.

This call story does emphasize the greatness and holiness of God in comparison with Isaiah's own frailty, even uncleanness and unworthiness. It is important that this must be understood these contrasting emphases within "the broader context of Isaiah and the Bible as a whole. God as a holy God does indeed confront wrongdoing and demand repentance but God's holiness serves God's will for healing and wellbeing for the sake both of God's people themselves and of all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3)." ⁶²

Isaiah accurately portrays himself as a person of "unclean lips,"⁶³ God's response is not to cast Isaiah away but to heal Isaiah. Isaiah finds healing in order to devote himself to bringing healing to Israel. The deference to God in worship and especially the confession of sins are part of the bigger movement toward engaging in any vocation in God's service.

The essence of worship is to be empowered in order to serve God in accordance to his will for creation. God creates a people in order to bring God's message of healing to all of the earth. God deserves our trust, because God brings us salvation - in our need. God's response to our sinfulness in empowerment for healing that comes to as simply as we turn to God in trust. Believers are healed so that they may bring healing to others. God's power, seen most definitively in God's life-giving mercy to sinners, will be made known throughout the earth.

All humankind owes their gratitude to God, the maker and sustainer of the universe. This gratitude flows most centrally from God's mercy. This mercy brings comfort, not condemnation, even as human beings most often fail to honour God in all his acts. God satisfies all human longings through his providential care. Out of human's thanksgiving flows witness of God's love to all the nations of the earth. Worship is a time to be reminded of God's greatness and to endeavour to share that greatness to those in need by our witness to all the ends of the earth.

There is a portrayal of a link in God's greatness and holiness in worship (12:6) with this resulting in the worshippers' joy and sense of wellbeing. God here is indeed great and holy; however, this greatness and holiness is not something to evoke terror and a sense of unworthiness. God's greatness and holiness empowers any sinful but trusting humanity to bring healing to all corners of the earth.

McFarland observed that there are typological significances in the shaking of the door posts and the house filled with smoke. This bears a connection firmly with other Scripture to give a deeper understanding of Isaiah 6:4. It should be remembered that God had the Israelites paint the door posts of their dwelling places with the blood on the twilight of the Passover (Exodus 12:3-14). Jesus Christ speaks of a house built upon a solid foundation which makes connection to the house of a believer built upon the solid foundation of Christ able to endure difficult times (Mat. 7:24-27). The posts of a door can be easily connected to symbolize the spiritual entry place of a believer; it is the entrance place that leads to where a believer's heart, mind, and soul are contained, and it opens the door to Christ and reveals the actual state of the heart of that believer. When this is combined with the purifying smoke associated with the heavenly throne room in Isaiah 6, an easy connection to the purifying smoke emitting from the fire-sacrificed lambs (Leviticus 1-9), then a deeper understanding of Isaiah 6:4 can be gained.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Isaiah's experience and encounter with the numinous should be the norm whenever people come to worship before the almighty God. Isaiah's experience goes beyond normal Old Testament's sacrifices' experience which is externally motivated and mediated, his experience is internally motivated. He had his conscience purged and cleansed. He was no longer bound by guilt to his past and no longer overwhelmed with the sense of inadequacy and unworthiness. His past sins are gone and now ready for service in God's court/vineyard.

The immediate and utmost response to the living God (after atonement) in worship is service. Whenever there is a true encounter with God, experiencing the true nature and effect of an application of pardon; it gives a man freedom and boldness in the presence of God. It stimulates a readiness and cheerful obedience to his will, and engages him with the utmost swiftness in his service.

God must be the focus and attention of all worshippers. Worshipper's spiritual awareness, understanding and eventual cleansing are critical in offering a worthy worship unto God. The essence of worship is to be empowered for service in God's vineyard. This is because service is showing gratitude to God who had freely pardoned and qualified. True and faithful worship leads to transformation of life in readiness for service unto God and humanity.

ENDNOTES

¹ Loren Wilkinson. "Science, Art, and Worship." November 2, 2016. <http://marketplace.regent-college.edu/ideas-media/science/science-art-worship>.

² David Clayton. "Scientific Evidence that Man is made to Worship God?" Posted on January 27, 2015. <http://thewayofbeauty.org/2015/01/scientific-evidence-that-man-is-made-to-worship-god/> Accessed November 2, 2016.

³Ibid.

⁴ This is an allusion to the biblical account of God who holds all things by the power of His might. The Bible says all things (both visible and invisible) were made and sustained by God through Christ including mankind's redemption (Col. 1:15-20). Mankind's sin had serious adverse effects on all creation (see Hosea 4:1-3). Jesus Christ has to undo the effect of Adam's sin on entire creation and even the pattern of the heavenly things (see Heb. 9:20-28).

⁵ "God Is (1-7)." *The Word for Today*. August, September, October, (October 1-7, 2016):34-37.

⁶Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Book of Isaiah," in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Ed. Vharles M. Laymon. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 329.

⁷ Peter R. Ackroyd. "The Book of Isaiah," in *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Ed. Charles M. Laymon. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 329.

⁸ Ibid., 330.

⁹B. D. Napier. *Song of the Vineyard: A Guide through the Old Testament*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 250.

¹⁰Jack Partain and Richard Deutsch. *A Guide to Isaiah 1-39*. (London: SPCK, 1986), 4.

¹¹ Lawrence O. Richards. *Bible Reader's Companion*. (Colorado: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004), 409.

¹²Ted Grimsrud. "Worship and the prophetic vocation (Isaiah 6:1-8; 12:1-6)." October 28, 2017.

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¹³W. A. M. Beuken. "The Manifestation of Yahweh and the Commission of Isaiah: Isaiah 6 Read against the Background of Isaiah 1," *Calvin Theological Journal*: 39, 1, (2004): 73.

¹⁴Isaiah is an assumed author; but, early readers assigned authorship to him. Later scholars questioned Isaiah's authorship because from the available historical data recorded in chapters 40-66 occurred after his demise. However, they attribute the first 39 chapters to Prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz. (John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33, Revised Edition, Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), xliii.) Nevertheless, the issue of authorship is different from penmanship.

¹⁵ Ibid., xlii.

¹⁶ Paul R. House, "Isaiah's Call and Its Context in Isaiah 1-6," *Criswell Theological Review* 6, (1993): 209.

¹⁷ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 254.

¹⁸ House, 216.

¹⁹ Donald E. Gowan, "Isaiah 6:1-8," *Interpretation*: 45, no. 2 (1991): 173.

²⁰ G. H. and S. R. Driver Box, *The Book of Isaiah: Translated from a Text Revised in Accordance with the Results of Recent Criticism* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1909), 44.

²¹ H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary: Isaiah*. Vol. 1 (New York and Toronto: Funk & Wagnalls Company, ND), xii-xvii.

²² John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33, Revised Edition, Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2005): 103.

²³ House, 213.

²⁴ Ibid., 214.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kathy L. McFarland, "Isaiah 6:1-13: Exegesis." October 15, 2017.

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²⁷ Matthew Henry's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Vol. 4 (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, inc., 1996), 29.

²⁸ S. Paul Schilling, *Isaiah Speaks* (New York: Woman's Division of Christian Service Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1958), 22.

²⁹ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 177.

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- ³⁰ Robert L. Cate, "We Need to Be Saved (Isaiah 1:1-20; 5:1-12; 6:1-13)," *Review & Expositor*: 88, no. 2 (1991): 146.
- ³¹ House, 210.
- ³² Henry, 30.
- ³³ Beuken, 74.
- ³⁴ George Rawlinson, *The Pulpit Commentary: Isaiah*. Vol. 1. Eds. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (New York and Toronto: Funk & Wagnalls Company, ND), 106.
- ³⁵ ~WL Bibleworks 7\init\bw700\swc.electronic database
- ³⁶ af 'n" Bibleworks 7\init\bw700\swc.electronic database
- ³⁷ McFarland
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, ~yp i 'r" f . in *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 2003), 977. These are originally beings that are akin to mythically conceived with serpents' bodies or personified as lightening. They are Old Testament majestic beings with six wings, and human hands and voices.
- ⁴⁰ McFarland.
- ⁴¹ Henry, 31.
- ⁴² John Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm 29 and Habakkuk 3:9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6," *Vetus testamentum*: 29, No. 2 (1979): 149.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 150.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 143.
- ⁴⁵ McFarland.
- ⁴⁶ Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation, Holman New Testament Commentary*, vol. 12 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 149-150.
- ⁴⁷ Rawlinson, 107.
- ⁴⁸ McFarland.
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- ⁵⁰ Calvin, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-6.html>.
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- ⁵⁸ Matthew Poole's Commentary. October 29, 2017. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/isaiah/6-8.htm>.
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- ⁶² Grimsrud.
- ⁶³ By this, he marks himself out as a member of his community, which is also characterized by his unclean lips.
- ⁶⁴ McFarland.