

## Have You Ever Been "Undone?"

Last Sunday we noted that according to the greater church calendar it was Epiphany, and I shared with you a definition of Epiphany as God revealing Himself to the Gentiles. This morning I want to be more specific. There are actually two words I want you to be aware of, two words which sound somewhat similar. The one word is the word epiphany. The other word is Theophany. Now Theophany is really the correct word when we are talking about God revealing Himself. When the glory of God appeared to Isaiah in the Temple after the death of Uzziah the King, that was a Theophany. When the glory of the Lord filled Solomon's Temple at its completion and dedication that was a Theophany. When the glory of God came upon Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration that was a Theophany. When the Holy Spirit came upon the early believers on the Day of Pentecost, and when God revealed Himself to John on the Isle of Patmos, those were Theophanies. Any time God shows up and reveals His glory may rightly be called a Theophany.

Now, if the proper term for God revealing Himself is Theophany, what is epiphany? Perhaps the easiest way to catch the meaning of epiphany is to think of those frames in comic strips where a person is pictured with a light bulb above his head. The epiphany part comes in when we "get it." To put it all together we can say that when God reveals Himself, it is a Theophany and when we receive God's self-revelation, it is an epiphany. The Theophany is God's gift of Himself to us, and the epiphany is we receiving that Gift. The two things work together for our salvation, the Theophany and the epiphany.

This past Monday I was at the Wallaceton Church of God for a district meeting of Church of God pastors, and Ken Zitsch, Jr., was talking about Epiphany. He made the statement that when God comes and reveals Himself to us, we are undone. When you stop to think about this it could hardly be otherwise. God is so awesome, so powerful, and so overwhelmingly glorious, that anyone who encounters Him will be irrevocably changed--altered from that moment on.

Think of Paul on the road to Damascus. God revealed Himself to Paul on the road; it was a Theophany. Paul "got it;" he had an

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epiphany. Looking back on what that experience meant to him, Paul says in Philippians 3:7-8, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ." In other words, Paul was undone; his world was turned upside down. He was changed from the inside out. Even his name was changed from Saul to Paul. He could never be the same again.

Coming back to our Scripture lesson from Isaiah 6, we see that Isaiah was undone when He met God in the Temple at Jerusalem. Isaiah 6:1 says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple." This was the Theophany--Isaiah saw the Lord--the Lord revealed Himself to Isaiah. The Theophany continues through verse 4: Verses 2-4 say, "Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke." The epiphany comes in verse 5: "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Having seen the Lord, Isaiah recognized some things about himself and the people around him. In a flash, Isaiah recognized his own sinfulness and the sinfulness of his nation. It was an epiphany and everything changed from that moment on. Whatever Isaiah's career goals and personal plans had been before he entered the Temple that day, they were radically changed. Isaiah's life was undone so it could be redone; Isaiah became a true prophet of God and spent the rest of his life speaking God's truth to his nation.

Being sensitive to language, I get a charge out of the word selection in verse 5. I don't know if this tracks in the Hebrew but in the English it is unmistakable. Isaiah says, "Woe is me," w-o-e, meaning "I'm in a peck of trouble." But there is another English word pronounced "WO" and that word is spelled w-h-o-a which means "stop." The picture I get here is of a cartoon horse being reigned in by his rider. The front legs of this horse are stiffened

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straight out and its hooves are pointed and stuck deep into the ground, her nostrils are flared, she hunkers down in her hind-quarters and drags her bottom on the ground. The sound effects have her coming to a screeching halt. Woe is me and Whoa is me. Whenever and wherever God shows up, we are undone. We realize we are deep in sin; our plans are shown up for the hollow and selfish plans that they are. Our petty pet peeves, priorities, and shallow pursuits are shown up for what they are. Life as we have known it comes to a screeching halt. We are undone so we can be redone.

This is what we see time and time again throughout the Bible. Moses is given a Theophany in the burning bush and is made to understand his selection as the deliverer of Israel. His plans for a serene life in Midian were superceded by something much more important. The Christmas shepherds who were given a Theophany on their hillside would never tend sheep quite the same way again. The wise men that came to see Jesus fell down before Him and worshipped. They willingly gave their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and wished they had brought more to give. The Bible is revealing when it says that they went home by another way. Having seen the Christ child, they were undone; they would never be the same again.

Now what I'm wondering about this morning is this: Is this Theophany/epiphany thing rare and reserved only for the great heroes of the Bible, or is this process normal for ordinary believers? And, secondly, if it is in anyway normal, is there anything we can do to position ourselves to experience it? My second inquiry gives away my bias regarding the first one. It seems to me that the Theophany/epiphany pattern is absolutely normal for ordinary believers. Some would want to say that since we have the Bible as a written record of God's actions in the past, we don't need any earth shaking, life transforming experiences with Him today. I would say that given the spiritual apathy and powerlessness experienced by so many contemporary Christians, and the weakness of so many Christian churches--including our own--and the choke hold secular humanistic thought has on our culture, we need some pretty heavy spiritual breakouts. We need to see God in His holiness so that we can be undone in our unholiness and redone for His glory. We need the Theophanies that will enable us to have a lot more of those life-changing epiphanies. And if that is not enough to convince you, I would simply remind you of Jesus' words to Nicodemus: "You must

be born again." And further, as Jesus states in John 3:5-7: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" You see, we all need to see God in some way and be undone so we can be redone to His glory. We all, sooner or later, need to be born again.

But where do we begin? Coming back to our Scripture lesson for this morning, I believe we can see some things in the life of Isaiah that will help us come to an encounter with Christ. Number one, Isaiah 6 begins by setting Isaiah's experience at a particular moment in history. It was the year King Uzziah died. This is significant because Uzziah was a well-loved, and basically good king in Judah. He was also king for 52 years, which was an exceptionally long reign. Isaiah and many others were traumatized by Uzziah's death. The "heads up" here is to look for the Lord in times of upheaval and trauma. Someone here this morning may be going through a very tough time in his or her life. You may be grieving the death of a loved one, the loss of a job or a house or even the loss of a spouse. You may be upset at what's going on in your neighborhood or in our country. If we can learn anything from the life of Isaiah it might be to suggest that this is an opportune time to encounter the Lord. The Scripture says that the Lord is near to the broken hearted. He lifts up those who have fallen. He looks with favor upon the humble and will not reject those who come to him with a contrite heart. The bruised reed He will not crush, the smoldering wick He will not snuff out. Don't run from the Lord when you are hurting; draw near to Him and He will draw near to you. **We are nearest to the Lord when we most know that we need Him.**

Look for the Lord in times of trauma. The number two thing we notice in Isaiah 6 is that Isaiah went to the Temple. Certainly, God is everywhere present and Theophanies can come anywhere and at any moment, but when you look at those recorded in the Bible, there are two places they occur the most. They occur in the Temple and they occur in the wilderness on mountaintops, which were also recognized by ancient peoples as places to worship. The idea here is that if you are shopping for strawberries, you probably won't find them at the butcher shop. There is something to be said for sacred space, spaces and places that have been dedicated to the

Lord and used to worship the Lord over a long period of time. There is a spiritual ambiance about such places that can aid in helping us encounter God. Isaiah, as his custom was, went to worship at the Temple. And, although nothing earth-shaking or even soul shaking usually happened to him there, this time it did. If you spend enough time in the woods in Central Pennsylvania and pay attention, you will sooner or later see a deer. If you hang out in the church long enough with an open heart you will sooner or later, run into God. **God will most likely show up where He has been invited to show up.**

Look for the Lord in times of trauma and distress and look for the Lord in places dedicated to His worship. A number three thing I take away from Isaiah 6 is that we need to come to the Lord alone. Most Biblical Theophanies, with the exception of the crossing of the Red Sea; Jesus with Peter, James, and John on the Mt. of Transfiguration; and Pentecost, are rather solitary experiences. But the key here is not the absence of other people; but, rather, solitary focus on the Lord. There's no way we can know for sure, but there were most likely other people in the Temple when Isaiah beheld his Theophany. Unlike many churches today, that sit idle between Sundays, the Temple in Jerusalem was a very busy place. There were daily sacrifices and daily worship; there were people there all the time. But Isaiah was so focused on the Lord that day that he was oblivious to anyone or anything else. He wasn't gawking around looking at what the guy next to him was wearing; Isaiah was seeking the Lord.

When was the last time your focus was cleanly on the Lord, when you wanted nothing so much as to be in touch with Him, to hear a word from Him, to be in fellowship with Him? Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." **Now is the time to seek the Lord with all our hearts.**

How close are you to a life-changing Theophany—an encounter with God that will transform your life? I don't know, but if you know that you need Him, if you are in the habit of putting yourself in holy places, and if you are seeking Him with all your heart, it won't be long until you find Him. The Lord says in Revelation 21:6, **"It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."**

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Sermon for January 13, 2008

**Have You Ever Been "Undone?"**

**Isaiah 6:1-13**

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