



UNITED BY HOPE – Part 8

A Word From God After Election Day

If you have God’s Word—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open up with me to two places—1 Peter 2 and Isaiah 6. The original plan today was to move on to the next verses, 1 Peter 2:18-25, which are pretty intense verses that deal with slavery. Lord willing, we’ll get to those verses next week, as Mike plans to lead us through that text. But in light of everything going on in our country this last week, and specifically the news yesterday, we decided yesterday afternoon to spend one more week in 1 Peter 2:17 on fearing God as citizens in our country.

Last night I found myself on my knees in my office pleading for a clear word from God to speak to you today. Not a word from me—I’ve tried my best not to give you words from me over the past weeks in particular—as much as, honestly, part of me would like to. I think some people have thought maybe I’m politically neutral or I don’t have strong convictions on political positions. I actually have some really strong convictions that part of me would love to share, because I think they’re right. As a pastor in a church that belongs to Jesus, my calling is not to try to convince you why my political calculations are the right ones, no matter how much I believe they are. As a pastor, my calling is to point you to what God has clearly said in His Word. I want you to be able to come to this gathering every week and know you’re going to hear a word from God. You don’t need more opinions in this world; you have plenty of those. You need the Word of God.

This is why I found myself on my face last night before Him, in light of all that’s going on in our country right now, particularly here in the capital of our country. I was just asking, “God, what are You saying to Your people in this moment?” When I say, “in this moment,” I’m obviously thinking about the election in our country this week, including long days and nights of ballot counting in different states, then yesterday the election being called for former Vice President Joe Biden, leading to a speech he gave last night. Meanwhile our current President and others are contesting that conclusion, and of course no results have been certified.

In light of all of that, I was praying and many different people were coming to my mind. Some of you may have seen an op ed I wrote in the Washington Post at the beginning of this pandemic, saying there were a lot of disadvantages at that point to preaching to an empty room, looking into a camera, including a longing to be together as we talked about tough issues in our lives and in the world around us. But one of

the advantages was how it's helped me picture a lot of different people on the other side of that screen, even now as we're still limited in the number of people who can gather together.

So here's who I was picturing—not just in this room, but on the other side of that screen—as I was praying last night. I was picturing the person who was really upset yesterday, maybe even angry at what the news was reporting, and is still upset at the thought of a Democratic presidency led by Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. I also pictured the person who was relieved as they saw those same headlines and listened to those speeches last night. At the same time, I pictured people who feel pretty numb in the middle of it all, people who weren't thrilled about either candidate and couldn't really envision being thrilled about any outcome in this election.

Then it got more personal, because as we know here in this city, elections are not distant from us. I pictured people in our church whose jobs are likely going away two months from now. I talked with one brother yesterday who is not sure how he's going to be providing for his family come January 21. I started thinking about brothers and sisters who may leave Washington, DC, including some in our fellowship because of this election.

Then I thought about people who are not yet followers of Jesus and who are listening today from a variety of different perspectives. Then I pictured all the people who, amidst all the craziness in our country this week, haven't really been paying much attention to it at all, not because they don't care, but because they're so overwhelmed by other things going on in their lives. I think of a brother this week whose only son was playing games one day with his friends, then all of a sudden collapsed and died. He and his wife and the daughters are grieving in a way they couldn't have imagined a week ago.

I think of a sister whose parents tested positive for COVID and were taken by ambulance to the hospital just a couple days ago, due to severe complications they suddenly developed. I could go on and on, but I found myself before the Lord last night just asking, “What word do You have for all these people, God?”—for every one of them, for every one of you. Obviously, I'm not asking for some word out of nowhere. I'm asking this question with my Bible open and I eventually landed on these two passages.

So my aim in the next few minutes—in light of all that has happened and is happening in our country, and all that's happening in your life—is to bring you God's Word. We're going to start in 1 Peter 2:17 and then go to Isaiah 6. I want to show you three ways I believe God is speaking to us in this moment, specifically to us as a church here in Metro Washington, DC, although I trust these words from God also apply to those of you who are listening or watching from beyond DC, here in the United States or elsewhere.

1. God is calling us to fear Him more than we ever have before.

God is speaking to us in this present moment, calling us to fear Him more than we ever have before, regardless of who is in the White House and what you feel about that. Regardless of what is going

on in your life or my life, I can confidently say that God is clearly calling you and me to fear Him more than we ever have before. I can say that because it's a direct command in 1 Peter 2:17. We looked at it last week: *"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God."*

Fear God. I am confident God doesn't want us to fear Him less now than we did last week or less today than we did even yesterday. God wants us to fear Him more today than we did yesterday at this time. So is that true for you? Are you growing in your fear of God right now, in deeper ways than you have ever experienced? We talked last week about what that means. I was tempted to just re-preach that sermon because I don't assume we got it all. If you missed it, I would encourage you to go back and listen or read it. As a reminder, we fear God because of His ultimate authority, His ultimate justice and His ultimate goodness. Fearing Him means worshiping Him, trusting in Him, delighting in Him.

Instead of just talking about those things, when Mike and Wade and I were talking yesterday, Mike mentioned Isaiah 6 at one point in our conversation. Last night I found myself in that passage. It is such a powerful picture of what we saw last week. So I want you to turn with me there, because we're going to spend most of our time in Isaiah 6. It's a pretty well-known passage in the Old Testament, although if you're a new Christian or you're exploring Christianity, it might be new to you. So let's read this story beginning in Isaiah 6:1 about an encounter Isaiah had with God that totally changed his life. There are a variety of things I think apply to this moment we're in.

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"*

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

We'll pause there for now, but I want us to think about the rest of the chapter in a minute.

It's interesting that whenever we see this command to fear God in the Bible, like we see in 1 Peter 2, immediately people will say, "Well, that doesn't actually mean to be afraid of God. It just means to have reverence for God." But when I look at Isaiah 6, it sure seems like Isaiah is afraid. Actually, most people who have this kind of encounter with God in the Bible seem afraid.

When God revealed His glory at Mt. Sinai, the Bible says, *"...there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp*

trembled” (Exodus 19:16). They had to stay away from the mountain lest they be consumed. When God spoke in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Bible says, “*When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified*” (Matthew 17:6). John says about seeing Jesus in the book of Revelation, “*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead*” (Revelation 1:17).

All this to say, if you or I were to have a vision of God like we’re reading about right now, there’s no chance we would be sitting calmly in our seats. We would be trembling, terrified, falling on our faces in fear. That’s what the Bible is talking about here.

I want you to notice something really interesting about Isaiah 6. Notice when this happened: “*In the year that King Uzziah died...*” I want to give a really clear caveat here. I’m definitely not drawing a parallel here between King Uzziah and Israel with any former, current or potential President of the United States. I’m not drawing a parallel between Uzziah being on the throne there for 52 years and a presidential election that happens here every four years.

I do want to generally point out that in Isaiah’s day, in light of the death of King Uzziah, Israel was facing an uncertain time with much unrest. It was a time of political decay, social decay and spiritual decay. As I think about all those things, I think they’re all true in our country right now: uncertainty, unrest, political, social and spiritual decay. So could it be that this vision Isaiah saw at that time is a vision we really need to see at this time?

As I was meditating on this passage last night, I just started writing out what Isaiah saw about God that brought him to fear God. As I wrote this list, it was clear to me that we need to see the same things. So here’s a quick list of seven things. There are so many more here, but for the sake of time we’ll stick with seven things Isaiah saw about God that we need to see about God if we’re going to fear Him rightly.

1. God is in control. Check this out. “*In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord...*” What’s interesting is here you see Lord written with lower-case letters. But later in verse three, the same word is written this way: LORD. Does that look any different? This one uses small caps. What’s the difference? These are two different words in the original language of the Old Testament. Whenever you see it written “Lord,” that’s Adonai, which is basically a title for God that means “the sovereign one” or “the ruler.” But when you see “LORD,” that’s Yahweh, which is the name for God. Picture a title and name, such as President George Washington. President is his title; George Washington is his name.

This is a title here in verse one: “I saw the sovereign One sitting upon a throne.” Think about why that’s significant. At that time, there was unrest and uncertainty in Isaiah’s day, with all kinds of questions, including, “Who’s on the throne?” Isaiah looks up and suddenly realizes, “There’s no question who is on the throne. God is on the throne and He is in control.” Isn’t that comforting to know?

Leaders in this world come; leaders in this world go. The turnover rate of leadership in this world is 100%. And not just leaders—people. Over a hundred years from now, if Jesus has not come back yet, ten

billion new people will be on the planet, and all seven billion of us will be gone, just as dead as Uzziah was. But God will still be alive and God will still be on the throne.

Notice, God is not running back and forth, frantically trying to fix this or that. Be encouraged. Heaven is not coming apart at the seams over what's happening on earth. This means God can handle every fear we wrestle with in our frailty in this world. He is seated on the throne and in control of it all. That's the first thing Isaiah saw.

2. God is in a class of His own. God's throne is not one among many thrones. His throne is "*high and lifted up*"—far above all. I love what A.W. Tozer says about how high and lifted up God is:

We must not think of God as highest in an ascending order of beings, starting with a single cell, going up to the fish to the bird to the animal to man to angel to cherub to God....He is as high above an archangel as above a caterpillar, for the gulf that separated the archangel from the caterpillar is but finite, while the gulf between God and the archangel is infinite.

There is no one like God. He is in a class of His own.

3. God is awesome in His beauty. "...[T]he train of his robe filled the temple." Picture a bride's beautiful wedding dress with a train flowing behind her, or the train of a king whose royal robe is following behind him. The imagery here is the fullness of God's splendor spread across heaven, emanating in every direction.

4. God is surrounded by awe. Get this scene. Lest you think I'm exaggerating any imagery here, above God stood the seraphim. That word means "burning ones." These are angelic attendants that are literally ablaze with the adoration of God, ablaze with awe before God. "*Each had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*"

Don't picture soft, flighty little pudgy creatures with wings fluttering here and there, playing a harp along the way. There are no silly, puny creatures in heaven. Picture them more like the Blue Angels diving in formation, back and forth. Yet these are not machines; they are creatures, covering themselves in humble awe before God. Isaiah doesn't tell us how many there are, but John tells us in Revelation 5 that there are myriads and myriads of them—multitudes and millions of them. Every single one of them is flaming with pure nuclear-powered praise of God.

Do you realize what this means? We've gathered for worship today, but when we started singing a little while ago, we were actually joining in a chorus that was already resounding to the praise of God in heaven. We weren't getting anything started. We were joining in that which was already happening. Even now, at this moment, while you're sitting there and I'm talking, there are myriads of heavenly beings

surrounding the throne of God, shouting His praise. When you go to bed tonight and start to snore, they will still be singing. When you wake up, they will still be shouting.

5. God is perfect in His purity. This leads to the question, “What are they singing? What is their song selection?” “*Holy, holy, holy...*” It’s like they’re grasping at the leash of language to try to express the incomprehensible, incomparable, unimaginable nature of God. They just keep saying the same word over and over and over again. “God is holy, holy, holy.” There is no one, nothing like God. God is perfect in purity. There is nothing wrong in God. Everything is wonderful and right and good and pure in God.

6. God commands a heavenly army. God is not weak. He possesses all power. “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts...*” This word “hosts” refers to angelic armies at God’s disposal. Don’t ever forget, amidst everything going on in our lives, our country, in the world, there’s a spiritual battle. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers and powers and authorities in this dark world (Ephesians 6:12). There are spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. God commands a heavenly army of angels who battle for the good of people and for the glory of His name across the earth.

7. God fills the earth with His glory. “...[T]he whole earth is full of his glory.” Yes. Do not fret over leaders in this world and do not put your ultimate trust in them. Instead, fear the Lord Who told the sun to rise today and it obeyed. He tells the wind to blow and it obeys. He tells the mountains to be still and they are. He tells the waves to crash and they do. Isaiah 44:23 says, “*Shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest and every tree in it!*”

Did you know that there are 1.2 million mountains in the world? Did you know that there are 3.04 trillion trees in the world? I don’t know how anyone counted all the trees in the world, but we’ll go with it. There are 1.2 million mountains and 3.04 trillion trees, and every single one of them is singing and shouting every day about the glory of the God Who made them.

Isaiah 40:26 says, “*Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name*” (NIV). Do you know how many stars we can observe in our universe using our best telescopes? About a billion trillion. Again, I don’t know who did the counting on that, but a billion trillion stars, every single one of them with a name that shouts the glory of God.

Check out this picture of the Northern Lights. Fear the God Who creates that. Fear the God Who paints the sky with His fingertips. This is why the foundations of the thresholds shook and the house was filled with smoke. Are you getting the picture here? Are you realizing Who God is? Are you putting a presidential election in perspective?



God is the sovereign King on the throne, which means God is the President over the president. So don't hope in or fret over who's in the White House now, or three months from now, or any time in the future. No, fear the One Who holds every person in the White House in the palm of His hand. God is the Legislator over all the legislators. Do not hope in or fret over who the lawmakers are in congress. Fear the One Whose Law governs the cosmos.

God is the Supreme Court over the supreme court. Don't hope in or fret over justices on a bench in a country. Fear the One Who sits as the final Judge of every man, woman, boy and girl in the world, after Whom there is no appeal forever. Let this soak in. There are not three branches of government in the universe; there is no balance of power. God is the Chief Executive; God is the Legislature; God is the Court. So fear Him alone.

Now, obviously none of this means we are apathetic or unconcerned about politics, policies, immorality and injustice in this world. We talked about this two weeks ago. We steward God's grace to foster a government that promotes good and protects against evil. But here's the key: We do all of that with deep, peaceful, joyful confidence—not in a candidate or a party or an outcome, but in the King Who sits on the throne of the universe.

We fear God alone. He cannot be matched by anyone or anything. In power, He is omnipotent. In knowledge He is omniscient. He is perfect in wisdom, love, justice, wrath and mercy. All of His attributes are infinite. There is no end to the grandeur of God. He can't be matched; He can't be measured and mark it down—God will not be mocked.

Indeed, let us be very careful. Whenever we hear God's name invoked in our political discourse today—people or politicians speaking, acting, leading and legislating in all kinds of ways that go against God's Word, only to finish with a hearty "God bless America"—the reality is God will not bless a nation that defies His Word and defames His name. The only reason the United States has not already collapsed completely is the common grace of God. And the only reason our country will be here tomorrow is if God in His grace sustains it.

2. God is calling us to cry out for His mercy like our lives, families, church, city country and world depend on it...because they do.

This leads to the second way God is speaking to us today. First, God is calling us to fear Him more than we ever have before. Second, God is calling us to cry out for His mercy like our lives, families, church, city, country and world depend on it...because they do. We need the mercy of God in all of these spheres, starting in our own lives.

Did you notice Isaiah's response to this vision of God? It wasn't, "Wow!" It was, "Woe is me!" The picture is Isaiah saying, "Judgment be upon me for my sin in the presence this holy God." Isn't it interesting that these are Isaiah's first words in this book that he speaks directly? The first words he says are not, "Woe upon you. Woe upon this nation or that nation, this people or that people." His first words are, "Woe upon me because I'm a sinner before a God Who is holy."

Think about it. We've now spent months in our country examining two candidates and what we believe is right or wrong about each of them, evaluating their personalities, their positions and their policies. So I ask, "Have we done the same process of examination and evaluation with our own hearts before a holy God?" If not, we're in a very dangerous spot; if not, you are in a very dangerous spot. If you do not first search the uncleanness of your own lips, the depth of your sin against God, your desperation for His mercy in your life, then you are in a very dangerous place.

God, give us a humble view of ourselves. God, help us not see ourselves above Donald Trump or above Joe Biden. At the cross we are all desperately in need of mercy that only Jesus can provide. God, help us all to see our need for mercy and learn to show mercy to others who need the same as we live among a people of unclean lips.

We live in a sinful world, a sinful country and a sinful city. Listen to Romans 1 and the picture of sin in and around us.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

God, have mercy on us. God, give us a right view of ourselves before Your holiness. Help us to see, “Woe are we.” We deserve the judgment of God, which means we desperately need the mercy of God.

The startling reality of Isaiah 6—and all of the Bible—is that God actually stands ready to dispense mercy to all who ask. Even here in Isaiah, this angel, at the bidding of God, goes to the altar, the place of sacrifice, takes an object and touches Isaiah’s lips—a picture of his cleansing, as God says in verse seven, “...*your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.*”

How is it possible for the holy and just Judge of the universe to declare a sinner not guilty of sin? It’s only possible if a sacrifice has been paid to cover over that sin. This is what the book of Isaiah is all about, pointing us to the One Who would come as a sacrifice for sin. Isaiah 53 tells us how Jesus would come as God’s Son to pay the price for sins. He would be “*pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities,*” upon him would be “*the chastisement that brought peace, and with his wounds we are healed*”(Isaiah 53:5).

For those of you who are not Christians, listen really closely here. You will one day stand before God as your holy Judge. It could be today. It could be tomorrow. And on your own, in your sin, left to yourself, you will be cast out of God’s presence into everlasting eternal judgment. There will be no appeal. But God loves you and has made a way for you to be forgiven of your sin, to have your sin covered over. He has sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sin—for the sin of all who will turn and trust in Him. So I urge you to trust in Jesus today. Cry out for God’s mercy that He will gladly give you when you cry out to Him.

Then, Christian brother or sister, don’t stop there. Yes, we have been saved from our sins, but do we still need His mercy in our lives? Absolutely! We need new mercy every morning. We need His mercy to save us from temptations to sin, to save us daily from ourselves. Do we need His mercy in our families? Then let’s cry out for His mercy in our families. Do we need mercy in our church? Yes! So let’s cry out for it. Do we need His mercy in this city? Do we need His mercy in this country? Absolutely we do. So let’s be a people who are crying out for it. We are called by God to stand in the gap and plead for His mercy, not just in our lives, but in others’ lives, in our families, in our church, in our city and in our country.

So, yes, we pray—regardless of who our President is. We pray for our President. We pray for other leaders. We pray for God’s mercy on them, for God’s mercy through them, just like 1 Timothy 2 commands us to do, so that we might proclaim His gospel in the world—His good news of mercy in Jesus.

3. God is calling us to get on with our mission.

This leads to the last way God is speaking to us in this moment. Church, God is calling us to get on with our mission. God says to Isaiah, “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” In other words, “Who will tell people about Who I am, about judgment that is coming, about mercy that is available right now?” Isaiah jumps up and says, “*Here I am!*” as if to say, “Look no further.” “*Send me.*”

Brothers and sisters at MBC, these have been challenging months for sure, amidst racial tensions and political division in our country, in the church at large and creeping into the church among us more and more. In it all, I think it's obvious that the adversary has distracted us from what is most important, from leading people to Jesus, from leading people to the only One Who can do and give and provide what no presidential candidate can do or give or provide.

So let's say together in a fresh way on this day, in this moment before God, "Here we are. Send us." Send us in the city, in this country. Maybe God is calling some of us right now to take the gospel to other nations where the name of Jesus is not even known, knowing that wherever we are, following Jesus and leading people to Him will not be easy in this world; maybe even increasingly hard or costly, even in our own country.

That's the whole point of Isaiah 6:9-13. You read those verses and see that God tells Isaiah, "It's going to be hard. People aren't going to listen and you're going to find yourself saying over and over again, 'How long, O Lord?'" And you'll experience temptations to give up or to give in along the way. But that's what this vision is all about—Isaiah and you and me pressing on and proclaiming God's Word. Why? Because we fear God more than we ever have. And the more we increase in our fear of God, the more we will decrease in our fear of anything and everything else. We're crying out to God for His mercy. Let's do this together. In our lives, our families, as a church, for our city, for our country—let's cry out together for God's mercy. As we do, let's rise to our feet and get on with our mission. Let's go out and live according to this gospel we believe.

Regardless of the outcome of the election, we have voted out of a conviction that unborn children are beautiful to God. So let's live it out now, as we serve women with unwanted pregnancies, as we foster and adopt. Today is Orphan Sunday around the world. God is going to raise up multitudes of families in our church family who will care for children in need. We've voted out of a conviction that racism is wrong and people in need must not be ignored. So let's live it out by loving neighbors across the city as ourselves.

I've got to show you this picture. Yesterday morning, as networks started calling the election and word started spreading, do you know what was happening here in Herndon? Cars were lining up to receive boxes of food and this church was sharing the gospel with every single one of them. These cars were some of the last ones. These members of our church family stayed all the way to the end, just like so many of you have done every week in



sites all across this city over the last seven months. Why? Because we're called to something bigger. Because this is what we're on this earth to do. This is why we're citizens of this country right now.

In this moment, we're citizens of this country in order to lead people to another country—a better country, a heavenly country —where sin, sorrow, strife and division will one day be gone. A country where all who have feared God, who have cried out for His mercy and who are following Him on mission will join with people from every nation, There we will see our God. We will behold Him in all His beauty, grandeur and glory. We will enjoy Him together forever and ever and ever. Surely this is a hope we can unite around as the people of God.

So we pray, O God, help fear You today more than we ever have before. God, we cry out for Your mercy upon us. I pray for everyone listening right now who does not have a personal relationship with You through faith in Jesus, that today would be the day they would cry out for Your mercy and put their trust in You, Jesus.

Even as we continue to cry out for Your mercy in our lives, in our families, in our church, God we pray for Your mercy in Metro Washington, DC. We pray for Your mercy in the United States. We pray for Your mercy among the nations. And as we pray that, we pray You would help us get on with the mission You've given us. God, keep us from being distracted. Help us to lead people to enjoy, know, worship, fear and love You through faith in Jesus. In His name we pray all these things. Amen.

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