



# Bible Study

March 23, 2016

Isaiah 6:1-12

Genesis 28:10-17

Proverbs 9:1-11

Isaiah 6:1-12 (NKJV) -

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because 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.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.” Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.” Then I said, “Lord, how long?” And He answered: “Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, the LORD has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.”

Genesis 28:10-17 (NKJV) - Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was

afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

Proverbs 9:1-11 (NKJV) - Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; she has slaughtered her meat, she has mixed her wine, she has also furnished her table. She has sent out her maidens, she cries out from the highest places of the city, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding. He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you.

### **Commentary -**

We, as people, place a high value on truth, or at least we claim to. While all manner of sins are excused or even lauded by our modern society, deceit, treachery, and betrayal receive no quarter. We say that we want honesty, and that we admire people who, without concern for political correctness or for people's feelings, 'tell it like it is'. We claim to want the truth, even when told that we may not be able to handle it. People go on grand quests and pilgrimages to discover the real truth about themselves and about their existence. The disciplines of philosophy and science have as their stated goal the establishment of the truth regarding our world and our existence.

As Orthodox Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ Himself is the Truth. That is simple to say, but what does it mean? We believe that Christ is the Word of God which made the universe, and that everything in our world, both visible and invisible, both physical and spiritual is therefore a reflection in various ways of His person. More directly, we believe that every human person is made in His image. This means that we can only understand who we are, what our world is about, our purpose in life, and any other related questions by coming to know Christ. He reveals the purpose of life, what it means to be truly human, and how we ought to live. Further, as we see in today's reading from Genesis, as interpreted prophetically by Christ Himself in John 1:51, Christ's flesh, His humanity which He received from His mother, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, is the connection between our world and heaven.

While meditating upon Christ as the Truth leads us to further worship and glorify Him, if we measure ourselves against Christ as our standard for how we are to live in communion with God and with one another, we discover further truth, though this truth about ourselves is much less beautiful and appealing. The truth is that in the light of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, we see that we ourselves are sinners, and unworthy to enter into the presence of God. We see that to even attempt to draw near to God would represent great danger for us. Like Isaiah in his vision which we read about today, we are undone. Coming to know the Truth that is Jesus Christ leads us to worship and glorify Him for His greatness, but also to the certain knowledge of our own uncleanness and weakness, and failure to measure up to His likeness, despite being made in His image.

However, what today's reading from Proverbs tells us is that this knowledge too, this message which Isaiah was called to bring to the people of Israel, the knowledge of their condemnation for their sins, is also a gift from God for which we should be thankful. When we come to realize our own sinfulness and need for God's mercy, in that moment of repentance, in the receiving of His mercy and Grace, we find our salvation. Understanding what we have lost, in coming to know God in Christ, is the beginning of our regaining it in Christ.

During Great Lent, many of the hymns of the services focus on our sin, our unworthiness, our inability to even lift our eyes toward heaven due to our wickedness. These meditations are not meant to produce despair in us or a sense of inescapable condemnation. Rather, by embracing the truth about ourselves, the Truth of Christ comes into sharper relief and we come to truly experience the mercy and love of God by which we are saved. The truth is that we will only ever behold the Resurrection of Christ to the extent that we accept and bear His Cross. Let us therefore embrace our own weakness and struggles during this Lenten time, so that we can, in time, experience the strength of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Questions to Ponder -**

- 1) In today's reading from the prophecy of Isaiah, he is swept up in a vision of heaven, where he sees the worship continually offered by the heavenly powers to the Lord. Though this vision awes Isaiah and impresses upon him his own sinfulness and unworthiness, when the Lord sends him out to spread his word, though that word is bleak indeed, he does not hesitate to say, "Here I am, send me." Are there things in your life that you know that God has called you to do, or to abandon and stop doing? Is your response to God the same as Isaiah's, or do you offer God excuses as to why you can't do what you know He would have you do?
- 2) Today's reading from Genesis is taken out of order for the forefeast of the Annunciation. In John 1:51 Christ refers to this prophecy, saying that His disciples will see heaven opened and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, teaching us that the connection between heaven and earth is the flesh that our Lord took to Himself from the Theotokos. If it is true that Christ is our only means of connection between God and man, earth and heaven, how would you need to change your life in order to focus it on Him? Are there other ways that you are trying to climb up to the heavens (ala the Tower of Babel)? There is no means devised by men that leads to salvation.
- 3) Typically, we try to be around people whom we feel support us and build us up. We often interpret this as being people who will affirm whatever we choose and support any decision we make. Today's reading from Proverbs tells us that this is foolishness. In fact, we ought to prefer the company of those who are willing to rebuke us when we do wrong, and correct us when we sin. Does loving someone and seeking good for them meaning blindly supporting them, or telling them the truth? Are you willing to hear the truth from those who care about you, even when it hurts? Does hearing hard truths lead you to try to repent and improve, or harden you against the person who tells you what you don't want to hear?

### **Questions or Comments? [FrStephen@stgeorgecharleston.org](mailto:FrStephen@stgeorgecharleston.org)**

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