

THE HOLY STUMPS

Isaiah 6:1-13

Key verse 6:13

"And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

Thanks be to the Lord who richly blessed our end-of-year conference, encouraging us to participate in the sufferings of Christ with His word from 1 Peter 4:13. Through our Annual Key Word Symposiums, we were able to remember God's mighty work in the past year, give thanks to God, and find clear prayer topics for the new year.

Today, as we begin 2021, we study Isaiah chapter 6. It describes the prophet Isaiah's personal encounter with the holy God. He realizes that God is the sovereign and almighty ruler over the whole world. God cleanses Isaiah's unclean lips and appoints him as his messenger from the shepherd's heart for his people. Although the people would be very obdurate and not accept his message, God will leave a small remnant who will accept God's word. These remnant are holy stumps through whom God continues His story. Let us lift up our eyes to Almighty God, renew His calling voice, and be used as holy stumps.

1. The Lord sat on His throne (1-7)

Let's look at verse 1: "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." King Uzziah, who reigned in Judah from 787 to 735 B.C., had been one of the few God-fearing kings under whose reign Judah once again experienced a brief flourishing. Initially, Uzziah was humble and God-fearing because he listened to his shepherd. Israel prospered economically, militarily and politically. Later, however, Uzziah became haughty and

wanted to offer the sacrifice in the temple himself, which was actually reserved for the priests. As a result, he was punished by God with leprosy and spent the rest of his life secluded in his own house while his son Jotham reigned as king. As long as Uzziah lived, peace and prosperity reigned in Judah. His death now seemed to herald doom.

Isaiah describes in the preceding chapters 1 through 5 the extent to which the people were inwardly corrupt. Isaiah 1:4 says, "Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord ; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him." They enjoyed a high standard of living, but they had forsaken God in their hearts. The men were irresponsible and selfish (5:22). The leaders were interested only in their personal gain (3:14). The women were proud and lustful, caring only for their appearance (3:16). Many intellectuals got drunk from early morning to forget their despair (5:11). They had lost their moral standard so that they even boasted about their sins (3:9). God's heart was broken. God had carefully taken care of them like a vine dresser and prepared the best environment, but instead of good fruit, they produced bad fruit.

We too live in a time of prosperity and peace. At the same time we experience that the inner corruption of people is increasing more and more. From kindergarten on, ungodly teachings such as the theory of evolution and gender ideology are being spread.

Even worse is that even the theologians have relativized the Word of God and no longer proclaim truth. Because they have no word of God, young people cannot find the meaning and existence of life and live disoriented.

In such a godless time, Isaiah could despair because of the situation of his people. But he went to the temple to seek God. There he had an apparition that changed his life. Isaiah saw the glory of God. Let's read verse 1 again, "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." God appeared to Isaiah in the form of a man sitting on a high and lofty throne. The hem of his robe filled the temple. Through this, Isaiah realized that God is the almighty and sovereign ruler who is above all and holds everything in His hand. He is the King of kings who rules over the whole world.

Let's look at verse 2: "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." Here Isaiah describes the environment that shows the glory of God. Yet even the seraphim had to cover their beautiful faces before the holy God. Let's look at verse 3: "And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." God is holy. Holiness is the most important attribute of God that distinguishes Him from sinful men. All people long for the holiness of God.

Finally, the seraphim proclaimed that all lands are full of God's glory. Until now, Isaiah had thought that the whole world was mad. He thought that the world was full of evil men and immoral women. But God opened his spiritual eyes so that he could see that the whole world is full of God's glory. When we look at the world from God's point of view, this is really true. When we stand in front of Cologne Cathedral, it is a huge building, but when we look out of an airplane, it is only as big as a matchbox.

When we look at our society, there are many seemingly insurmountable problems, but from God's perspective it looks very different.

When we read the book of Isaiah, there was chaos and godlessness in many countries at that time. Because of their unrighteousness, they deserved God's judgment of wrath. But from God's perspective, all the lands were full of the glory of God. In other words, God is the sovereign and almighty God who is in control of everything. He is the Lord over the whole earth.

Germany is full of the glory of God. We had only earned God's wrath because of the sin from two world wars. But there were the people who prayed, and so God gave us peaceful reunification to use us as a royal priesthood for the world mission. Germany is also full of the glory of God because simple Korean nurses came to Germany in the 1960s and began to pray with the shepherd's heart for the young people of that country and invite them to Bible study. Germany is full of the glory of God because a house church has selflessly devoted itself to making disciples through Bible study and life fellowship for 40 years, so that both local people and Next Generation Missionaries could grow up to be the shepherds, Bible teachers and spiritual leaders.

In the past year, we have learned through the worldwide pandemic that neither the governments, nor the superpowers, nor the scientists have anything under control. All the world became helpless and anxious before a small invisible virus. Thus, we have experienced our own limitation and helplessness in front of the power of death, even because of a small virus. But because of today's Word, we may know that God is in control of everything. All lands are full of His glory even today. He uses even a pandemic to reveal His glory in all lands. We need not be in fear. Just as Isaiah admonished King Ahaz (7:9b), "If you do not believe, you will not remain," we too are to put our trust in God and move on to accomplish His saving work in this generation. He will

do His work and bring about spiritual revival in Europe through one-on-one Bible study. God will even establish three bases for the Muslim mission through us. All the lands are full of His glory!

Then how can we see God and meet Him personally? God reveals Himself to us as the Almighty and Living One and opens our spiritual eyes through His Word. During the New Year's Conference this week, we were greatly encouraged and saw the work of God through His Word, for example, through the empowering message of S. Peter Ryu, the beneficial Factual Studies of M. Dr. Petrus Chang and Sh. Warmherz Elsholz, and last but not least in the lives of Joshua E. and Sarah Sch., who had prepared excellent lectures on the inductive Bible study method.

What was the immediate result of Isaiah's encounter with the holy and almighty God, when the thresholds shook and the house became full of smoke? Isaiah was deeply frightened and filled with holy fear of God. Let's look at 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."

In the light of God's holiness, Isaiah realized what a terrible sinner he was. First of all, he was very troubled because of the impurity of his lips. These unclean lips refer to the unbelieving words and unbelieving thoughts. God created man's mouth so that he could praise and glorify Him with it. But he had not honored God, but murmured much with his mouth and habitually spoke unbelieving words. He realized that his people were also a people of unclean lips who had not honored God.

When Isaiah came to God with a repentant heart, God sent one of the seraphim to him. Consider verses 6 and 7: "Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips;

your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." A person's lips are very sensitive. Touching them with a red-hot coal must have been very painful, perhaps even leaving a permanent burn. It was a painful penance. But through it, his sin was atoned for and his guilt removed from him. God cleansed his lips to no longer speak unbelieving words, but to speak believing words of God so that he could bring God's message to his people.

In the past, the words of our baptized Next Gens were often full of unbelief with the worldly mind. Even dirty words of youth language came out of their mouths. But God worked mightily in them last year through intensive Bible study, repeated writing of their testimonies, and last but not least, memorizing Bible verses. God cleansed their unclean lips so that they could testify to God's work, accept Jesus' Lordship for their lives, and make a decision to be baptized.

2. God sent Isaiah (8-10)

Let us read verse 8: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" After Isaiah had received forgiveness of sins by the grace of God, and his unclean lips had been burned by the hot coals of repentance, he heard the voice of God calling out, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" This call reflects God's broken heart for His people. God's heart was broken because of the unbelief and rebellion of His people. Because of their sins, they had to experience God's judgment. They were like disobedient children who were already so full of wounds that God did not even know where else to strike them (1:5). But God did not give up on them. God invited them to be renewed through repentance. From his broken shepherd heart, God was looking for a person to send to them. God was looking for a person who would bring them the message of God and lead them back to God.

How did Isaiah respond to God's calling? Isaiah answered, without much hesitation, "Here I am, send me!" Isaiah was willing to accept God's assignment and let God send him. He could accept God's calling because he had personally met God and experienced His forgiveness. He could do it because he understood God's heart for His sinful people. He was willing to fulfill God's mission as God's messenger. He was ready to obey God's calling no matter when and no matter where God wanted to send him.

God sent Isaiah from a broken shepherd's heart to His people to preach the message of judgment to them. He was to exhort them again and again to turn back to God and put their trust not in worldly or military power, but in the Lord. He was to proclaim God's judgment on sin and at the same time God's grace for the future work of salvation and the restoration of Jerusalem. His message went so far as to encompass the time of the return from Babylonian captivity, the coming of Jesus the Messiah, and the future Kingdom of God's peace. Thus, God wanted to use him as His messenger in the history of God's salvation.

Let us look at verses 9 and 10: "He said, 'Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.'" God made no false promises to Isaiah about living with the calling. He would not achieve great success or receive human recognition. Rather, God sent Isaiah to a people who would not hear and would not see and would not understand. They were people who had deliberately hardened their hearts because they would not convert and recover.

Although Isaiah preached to them for about 40 years, they would continue to close their hearts to the Word of God. His life with the calling would be hard. Some kings, like Hezekiah, sought his help. But others per-

secuted him. It is said that King Manasseh had Isaiah cut in two after he took refuge in a hollow tree trunk. Despite all the sufferings and persecutions, Isaiah fulfilled God's calling to the end. He held fast to his calling, no matter what the cost.

3. The holy stumps (11-13)

It was not easy for Isaiah to preach to such hardened people. Let's look at verses 11 and 12: "Then I said, 'For how long, O Lord?' And he answered: 'Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.'" Isaiah was ready to fulfill God's task, but he wanted to have some kind of timetable, indeed to see some concrete tangible fruit. God's response, however, was first the message of judgment. God's judgment would come upon His hardened people, so that the people would be led far away, referring to the Babylonian captivity. God's judgment would even be repeated until only a small remnant of the people would remain, less than 10%. But then God testified to His hope that this small remnant would be like the stump of a tree that once again sprouts. Let us read verse 13: "And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land." When a big, strong tree is cut down, all that is left is a stump with the root in the ground. It looks like it is the end. But it isn't. The stump can sprout again and bring forth new shoots.

In the same way, God sees God's hope in the stumps for His people Israel. They will experience God's judgment. They will be led into Babylonian captivity. They will have to suffer and weep. But if they repent and convert, they will strike out anew. New life will come forth from the stumps. God's work is the work of the holy stumps. God purifies his people through judgment. But He finds

hope in the stumps that repent, return to the Word of God, and then bring forth new shoots and fruit.

I thank God for giving me His grace and great hope. I lived as a reckless egoist and selfish seller of light bulbs and vacuum cleaners. I had also finished school with the 10th grade and could never study at a university. In people's eyes, my life looked like a useless root stump. But God visited me through His living word. Mark 8:29, "...You are the Christ!" Through Luke 23:34a, "Father, forgive Jochen, for he does not know what he is doing," I was allowed to personally accept the absolute and forgiving love of Jesus. God called me with His hope with Lk 5:10b as a fisher of men, shepherd and Bible teacher. Based on today's word, I was allowed to receive anew that God considers a humanly seen useless sinner with his vision as a holy stump. I was allowed to repent of my impure lips of unbelief, that I was discouraged by the spiritual situation in this country and by the words of young people, so that I lost God's hope from my heart. But God cleanses me and raises me up anew as a holy stump for the Rhine-Sieg campus, for Germany and Europe. This year, based on Hebrews 11:6, I may learn faith pleasing to God. God will use me as a holy stump that will strike out again and bear fruit through one-on-one Bible study teams, disciple making, life and word fellowship.

As we have studied, Ezra and Nehemiah were holy stumps through whom Israel was restored. Ezra could have lived an elegant life in Babylon with a good career. But he remembered his family's spiritual heritage and set his heart on studying the law of the Lord. He became a Bible teacher to his people. He gathered a group of exiles and led them to Judah. God used him as a holy stump who returned the Bible (the Word of God) to His people and helped them live as a holy people of God who obey God's Word. Nehemiah had a prominent position as cup-bearer to the king of Persia. But he prayed for Jerusalem with a broken heart. As a leader, he mobilized the Israelites, who were utterly dejected and powerless, to re-

build the city walls, "Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem...!" (Nehemiah 2:17). Thus, God used him as a holy stump through which the walls were restored and their identity as God's people and royal priesthood was restored.

The twelve disciples of Jesus, who faithfully followed Jesus despite the misunderstandings and persecutions by the religious superiors and who went out into all the world preaching the gospel, were God's holy stumps. Martin Luther, who fought to the death to defend the truth of biblical doctrine in a time of spiritual corruption of the church, was God's holy stump. In our time, the Bremen pastor Olaf Latzel is a holy stump in the midst of a worldized and conformist national church because he preached the Word of God as God's Word without compromise, also not conforming to the church's gender ideology, although he took so much criticism for it and was suspended from ministry. Among us, we see Missionary Peter and Missionary Sarah, despite the numerous misunderstandings and slander, not thinking of themselves, but rather determined to be used as God's holy stumps even to the Muslim world. Our house churches, who are determined not to live for their petit-bourgeois happiness or for the betterment of their conditions, are holy stumps in God's history.

Our Next Generation, who decided to joyfully participate in Jesus' sufferings and be used by God as Global Leaders, are holy stumps because they do not follow the mainstream but Jesus and are willing to obey His Word. God will use these holy stumps so that Germany and Europe will be spiritually awakened and used as a shepherd nation and missionary sending continent for world mission.

Through today's lesson, we have seen that our God is the sovereign and almighty ruler. He is in control of everything. All lands are full of His glory. This almighty God calls us to be His messengers. Those who repent and accept God's calling are holy stumps for this generation. As holy stumps in this

new year, like Isaiah, let us preach the Word of God wholeheartedly through one-to-one Bible study teams, through discipling, and through GLEF. With the identity of holy stumps, let us serve the work of spiritual revival in Germany, Europe and all the way to the Muslim world.

Let us read the leading verse 13 together: "And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."