

THE HOLY STUMPS

Isaiah 6:1-13

Key verse 6,13

"Even if only the tenth part remains in it, it will be devastated again, but as with an oak and lime tree, of which a stump remains when it is cut down. A holy seed shall be such a stump."

Thanks be to God for abundantly blessing the studies of John's Gospel, through which we could know that Jesus is the Almighty and Sovereign God. Through the last lesson we were encouraged to come to Jesus with all our defeat who loves us absolutely and unchangingly. We could confess our love for him, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." From our deep love relationship with Jesus, we may feed his sheep. Today we learn how God revealed himself to Isaiah in the temple as the Almighty God on his throne: "The whole earth is full of his glory!" We may, in gratitude for his grace, respond to his call, "Whom shall I send, who will go for us?", "Here I am, send me!" God bless us, with clear identity as remnant and holy stumps, to commit our lives to the mission of God to the end and thereby be used as influential Bible teachers for this generation.

1. The Lord sits on the 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 reigned in Judah from 787 to 735 BC. Initially, Israel prospered economically, militarily and politically under his rule. But he became arrogant and performed the sacrifices reserved for the high priests himself. As a result, he was punished by God with leprosy. Chapters 1-5 of the Book of Isaiah describe how the people of Israel were inwardly corrupt despite their outward prosperity and good life. They were addicted to sorcery and idolatry. They entered into mixed marriages, lived according to their lust and desire and drank from early morning until late at night. In summary, although God had cared for them with all love like a vineyard keeper tending his vineyard, they despised his love and produced only bad fruit. Isaiah too must have been discouraged and heavy-hearted because of this spiritual plight of Israel and could see no hope for his people. But

in such a difficult time, the Almighty God met Isaiah personally by showing him a vision in which he saw the omnipotence and glory of God. In this vision, Isaiah saw an overwhelming image: God himself seated on a high and exalted throne. The hem of his robe filled the whole temple. Verses 2 and 3 say: "Seraphim stood over him; everyone had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one cried unto another, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts. All the earth is full of his glory." Isaiah saw the throne room of God with many glorious angels proclaiming God's holiness. He must have been completely moved by this vision because he recognized the almighty and sovereign God who holds everything, time and space, in his hand. Regardless of whether Israel worshipped him or not, he was the King of kings and Lord of lords for all eternity and had everything under his control. When Isaiah looked at the people of Israel, he could only see their sin and despair. But God opened his spiritual eyes that from God's point of view, not only the people of Israel, but even the whole world was full of the glory of God. From God's perspective, the people of Israel were even a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Because God was in control of everything, Isaiah did not have to grieve, but to have hope and a shepherd's heart for his people and to faithfully preach the sermon of repentance to them. We too may see the honor of God and glory of God everywhere, in our family, our neighbors, our Bible students and our country and even in the whole world.

We often stiffen or fixate on negative thoughts or on what we think is not going so well. We look at the limitations of the pandemic or the seemingly unconquerable influence of humanism in young people. But here we can also once again encounter the almighty God who has everything under control. The whole earth is full of his glory! Therefore, without looking at our-

selves or at the conditions, we can serve God's work with vision and gratitude. A young man had a tic problem in his teenage years and was learning more poorly than well in school. But his parents saw the glory of God in him in his teenage years through one-on-one Bible study. Through deep study of Hebrews 5:8,9, he met Jesus personally in the time of persecution and was also able to become a best student. Another young man could not speak until he was four years old and was labeled by psychologists as a case for special education. But his parents saw God's glory in him. They faithfully prayed for him based on Joshua 1:7, so that he grew into an empowered witness of the Gospel and Bible teacher who testified of his faith to numerous schoolmates. These two young men may please and give glory to God these days by graduating for his honor. We can also see that some young people like Lukas, Olaf and Kai enjoy coming for spiritual fellowship and Bible study even in the time of pandemic. Let us not look at ourselves but see that the whole earth is full of His glory! Then God will do His work in Germany and change it into a royal priesthood. He will even send missionaries among us to the Muslim countries and lead disciples of Jesus to faith in Jesus there.

Verse 4 says that the thresholds shook and the house was full of smoke. Isaiah was filled with deep fear of God. Verse 5 says, ""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." Isaiah realized in the light of God's holiness what a terrible sinner he was, who could not actually stand before the holy God. He realized that he had unclean lips that he had often spoken grumbling, doubting and unbelieving words that came from his own sinful thoughts. When Isaiah had a repentant heart, God sent one of the seraphim to him. Let's read 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." This touching of the lips with the hot coals must have been painful. But by it his sin was atoned for and his guilt taken from him. God cleansed his lips to no longer speak unbelieving words, but to speak believing words of God so that he could take the message to his people.

When we stand before the holy God, we too can only realize that we are the worst of sinners who cannot stand before God. In the light of God's holiness, we may repent of our sin, our impure thoughts and lips. Repentance, however, does not happen quickly and easily. Nor is it meant to make us feel better; in fact, it is often painful. But it is necessary so that we can come to new life and thereby serve God with new strength. A young woman spoke unbelieving words that she wanted to leave the church as soon as possible after she finished school. But God cleansed her unclean lips through Bible study with her parents and testimony writing, so that she could begin to come to Jesus with her issues. In this way she could repent and even be baptized and start a new life. Now she testifies with her lips to God's benefits on her life, through her testimony, talks and praise, and through this she can be used as a blessing for her classmates, for Cartagena and for the whole world. Let us not live blinded by the status of the world but look to the glory of God who sits on His throne. Let us use the privilege of repentance, of letting God cleanse our unclean lips, so that like the angels we honor and worship God through our words.

2. God sent Isaiah (8-10)

Let us look at 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 call of God, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" This call, "Whom shall I send?" reflects the broken shepherd heart of God for his people. God's heart was broken because of the unbelief and rebellion of his people. Out of this heart he sought a person, Isaiah, whom he could send to them and who could bring God's message. How did Isaiah respond to God's call? Isaiah did not seem to hesitate for long. He answered quickly and immediately, "Here I am, send me!" He understood God's heart and was ready to accept God's mission and be sent, regardless of when or where. God's calling is not an option, but the clear consequence of the forgiveness of sins. Isaiah understood that the goal of the grace of forgiveness of sin was not that he would live a nice, comfortable life, but that he would proclaim God's message to his people in sin and be used for their repentance.

Because of his broken shepherd heart, God is also looking for a person here and now to fulfill his mission. Shepherd Peter, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Peter Joseph, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Here I am, send me! Some respond to God's call, "Lord, please send someone else!" or "Why me?" But we too may, with clear decision, like Isaiah, accept his calling out of gratitude for God's grace. This calling is not just for some, but for every Christian who has received the grace of forgiveness and it is for life! Out of love for God's flock and gratitude, my parents also responded to God's call at a young age, "Here I am, send me!" by deciding to give up their dreams of a comfortable life and serve God's mission through life and death. Despite all difficulties and misunderstandings, they uncompromisingly committed their lives to the truth until the end. This enabled them to produce numerous fruits of faith, as we can see, for example, in our German shepherds and their house churches. For Isaiah, however, serving God's mission decisively would not be easy. Verses 9 and 10 say, "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 did not idealize missionary life. Isaiah was to preach the message of judgment to the Israelites. But he would not necessarily achieve visible great success or receive recognition; on the contrary, God sent Isaiah to a people who would not hear, would not see and would not understand. Isaiah preached to them for about 40 years. The outward fruit did not seem to be special. It is said that Isaiah was even killed with a saw by his opponents. Nevertheless, he held on to his calling until the end and God used him preciousy and worked mightily through him. From no other prophet are there so many promises about the Messiah. Life with mission is not necessarily comfortable and easy. Nevertheless, we may hold on to God's calling until the end and receive God's blessing through it. Let us hear God's call "Whom shall I send?" personally. God's heart aches because of the young people who are lost. May God give each of us the choice to obey God's calling and be used as His messengers.

3. The holy stumps (11-13)

It was not easy for Isaiah to preach to such hardened people. Verses 11 and 12 say: "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.'" Most of all Isaiah wanted to have a timetable and see foreseeable concrete fruit. But God's response was first the message of judgment. God's people were to be led into Babylonian captivity and the land would be deserted, less than 10% would return to Jerusalem. But God also testified also to the hope that a holy seed would remain. Verse 13 says: "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 tree is cut down, only a stump remains in the ground. Such a stump looks cut off, useless and lifeless. But such a stump can sprout again and produce new fresh shoots. God thereby revealed his hope that a holy seed would remain that has the potential to blossom again and grow into the great tree. He thereby revealed the hope for Israel that it could be used as a royal priesthood and a holy nation after all. Isaiah himself was a holy stump because he faithfully preached God's words, judgment and promises in a corrupt time. Ezra and Nehemiah would also be such stumps. Raised in Babylon with a good job, they could have lived a comfortable life in Babylon. But at a time when Israel was shattered outwardly and spiritually, they chose to be holy stumps and lead the rebuilding of Israel with God's vision. Despite much opposition, they fought the hard battle of faith to the end to rebuild the walls and establish the fear of God in the people of Israel. This enabled Israel to experience the great spiritual revival work.

We can learn here firstly that God is a God of hope. Even though we often have negative thoughts or see no hope, God sees potential in every person to be used preciousy. Secondly, we can learn that God's work is a work of the holy stumps, i.e. the remnant. At present, the doctrine of humanism is very strong. Even the church is adapting to the spirit of the age. A well-known Bible school in Germany with even evangelistic origins recently recognized same-sex marriages. Spiritual leaders who are faithful to the Bible are defamed or deposed. Bible-believing teaching is called "not up to date". In such times we often look at how difficult it is to find those who live with the Bible-believing faith

and lay down their lives for God. But God has planted some holy stumps through whom He continues His mighty work. You are all holy stumps that God is using precious for his work! In Luther's time, a small man looked small and useless against the great apparatus of the Catholic Church. But through his hard struggle together with a few remaining friends, he was able to gain the strength to exert a good influence on the whole world, and to testify to the righteousness that comes from faith alone. In these times of humanism, we too must not compromise, but as holy stumps stand clearly on the side of truth and fight the good fight of faith. When Missionary Peter lived according to the biblical truth and helped the young people and the Next Generation, people tried to hold him down and destroy him. But he did not bow to the spirit of the times, but lived unflinchingly as a remnant with a clear identity. We could experience that God laid the foundation for the Muslim mission through him. Especially during this time, he also helped our next generation through Bible study, so that they could meet Jesus personally and decide, based on 1 Peter 4:13, to participate in the sufferings of Jesus and continue God's work as holy stumps. Our shepherds also decided to serve God's work with clear identity as remnants through deep study of the Word of God, Factual Study, Inductive Bible Study - lectures and master classes. Through this we were able to experience that even in the pandemic we could participate in worship with people of hope.

God encourages me to serve God's work even as a remnant. I have sometimes become weary and discouraged in recent times to continue serving and struggling, not wanting to be the one remnant, but just go comfortably with the flow. But I repent of my spiritual laziness and disobedience to God's Word and my unclean lips. I may look to the Almighty God who sits on His throne. He has established me as one of the holy stumps. Therefore, through faithful Bible study and fellowship, I may serve God's work with clear decision. Through the hard struggle of faith and survival and through my habilitation, I may experience Jesus more deeply and learn how to live with clear identity as a remnant on the medical campus. I may hold on to Matthew 6:33 and see that God has left 120 holy stumps at the medical school and is using them as spiritual leaders.

God has planted us as holy stumps in our schools, colleges and universities, leading one-

on-one Bible study with Bible-believing faith as the remnant. Even if others want to accuse us or even destroy us, we may fight undeterred by faithfully leading one-on-one Bible study and life fellowship, writing testimonies to the Word of God and running the faith struggle to the end. Through this, God will raise up numerous disciples of Jesus in every faculty so that, according to Nehemiah 2:17, the broken walls in Germany, Europe and the whole world can be rebuilt. Today we have learned that God is the sovereign and almighty ruler. The whole earth is full of his glory. We have been encouraged that out of gratitude for God's grace we may respond without hesitation to his call, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" "Here am I. Send me!" Above all, with clear identity as a remnant, we may be used as holy stumps for building up of God's kingdom through obedience to God's mission in this age of humanism. This almighty God has left 100,000 Bible teachers as holy stumps in order to pioneer 1,700 universities with the Word of God, so that Germany and Europe are spiritually reawakened and used as a shepherd nation and as a missionary sending continent for the world mission. Let us read the key 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."