

# ***Epiphany - Encountering God's Call***

**Isaiah 6:1-8**

**Luke 5:1-11**

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At one time or another, every one of us will encounter powerful forces in our lives. Some of these powers will matter and some won't. Some powers we must learn to respect, and others aren't a big deal at all. Questions is - which is which?

Take Brian - I hear he's an OCTranspo driver. Enjoys his job. Has never encountered anything untoward. Till the Tuesday morning when a **very** powerful person got on the bus. Yes - power was staring Brian in the face.

And **HOW** was he going to respond?

The power was in the form of a big hulk of a man. About 6'8" tall, huge pecs, arms hanging down to the ground. He stared at Brian - and you need to remember that little Brian was maybe 5'3" and 140 lbs (**fully** clothed and sopping wet) - he stares at Brian and told him, "Big John doesn't pay!" Then he sat down at the back of the bus.

Brian didn't argue.

The next day, the same thing happened. Big John got on again, refused to pay, and sat down. It happened the next day, and again the day after that. Brian began to lose sleep over the way Big John was taking advantage of him. He felt overpowered, and didn't like it.

How to respond to this show of power?

Finally, he could stand it no longer. He signed up for body building courses, karate, judo, and a class on finding your self-esteem. By the end of the summer, little Brian had become quite strong and felt really good about himself.

The next Monday, Big John entered the bus and again declared, "Big John doesn't pay!" Enraged, Brian stood up, glared at Big John, and bellowed, "And why not?!"

With a surprised look on his face, Big John replied, "Big John has a bus pass."

Yes, that was one powerful presence that really **didn't** have to be too terribly concerning! No worries at all!

That's not always the case. There can be great power which we **must** respect, and before which we can do little but cower. Power that makes us shrink, and before which no body building or karate course is going to amount to anything.

Like the power of a hurricane. Category 1 hurricanes are small and have winds of 120 to 150 km/h. They create 1.5 to 2 metre-high waves. Category 5 hurricanes, the highest rating, have winds racing over 250 km/h, carrying waves sometimes 6m in height or more. Their power is terrifying!

A hurricane with 250km/h winds can put 11 tons of pressure against anything it hits. If a house is poorly built, it can be smashed, torn, or lifted off its foundation. Cars are often swept away in flash floods or blown over like little toys. Ocean waves wash over beach barriers, taking boats and houses back to sea.

When such power appears people take cover!

They duck.

Or run!

And well they should.

For such power can crush them in an instant.

Category 5 Hurricane power reminds human beings just how limited, how small, how vulnerable we really are.

After Hurricane Charley ripped its way through Florida in 2004, demolishing trees and billboard and homes, residents along Sand Lake Road near Orlando ventured outside, and found this one billboard standing -

“We need to talk! - God”

Ah, yes - there is the greatest power of all.

The power of God.

There was a man once who witnessed that power of God first hand. He was a prophet - one of the greatest, if not **THE** greatest, in Israel's history. His name was as revered as that of Moses. He is regarded as having prophesied “from the mouth of the Almighty”, rather than merely receiving a spirit of prophesy from his master. Along with Adam, Jacob and Jeremiah, he is one of four men in the Bible called “creatures of God.”

(*Isaiah*, E Young, vol 1, p.3).

A spiritual powerhouse he was.

An enormous reputation.

His name - Isaiah.

If anyone could face the power of God, it was him.

Watch what happens when he does.

Read with me, please - **ISAIAH 6:1-8 (p.635 OT)**

The passage indicates that Isaiah was in the temple. Perhaps doing exactly what we are doing here today - worshipping. If so, it could well be that he prays what we often pray - "Lord, bless us with your presence. Be with us as we worship you."

How often haven't we prayed something like that?

Almost weekly, right?

As they say - "Be careful what you pray for!"

For as Isaiah prays, God shows up.

And with him, heavenly servants.

Servants like Isaiah. Fellow worshipers.

They are seraphim.

Seraphim comes from a word meaning "burning."

They're brilliant in their glory.

We gather that they are part of God's army - strong angel warriors; perhaps the JTF2 of heaven.

Powerful, they are - their voices shake the temple to its foundations.

Yet not so brilliant or powerful that they can stand before God uncovered.

They cover their faces.

They cover their feet.

And only covered do they dare to offer praise and worship.

Isaiah sees it and says,

*"It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies."*

Isaiah gets it right -

To worship God, to praise him is not a **RIGHT** that we have. It is a privilege granted to those who are in right standing with the Lord.

And only to them!

One of the heavenly warriors flies to Isaiah with a live coal from the altar.

Isaiah can't make himself ready to be in God's presence.

Leviticus 16:12 gives us insight into the coal - the high priest would take coals and incense from the altar and bring them into the Most Holy Place to pray for himself and the people, to seek God's forgiveness and cleansing.

That's the coal that is referred to here in Isaiah 6.

It touches Isaiah.

He is declared pure because of what the altar and the sacrifice represent.  
The animal sacrifice of life given instead of the worshiper's life.

And the sacrifice makes all the difference.

No more "woe is me."

No more focusing on the sin; paralyzed and doomed because of that.

No more!

Instead Isaiah pipes up,  
"Pick me! Pick me!"

***Seeing bottom,  
and rescued from there,  
Isaiah is brought back up  
and sent out into service.***

And that, my friends, is how God prepares his servants.  
It is the pattern in Scripture, over and over again.

***Brought to the bottom.  
Broken.  
Restored.  
Commissioned.***

Every believer experiences this.

It's a pattern we see in our hymnal, # 424. Have a peek.

It says: *Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me....*

That's the request.

Just remember - "Be careful what you pray for!"

*Fall afresh on me.....*

And then, before asking to be molded, filled and used,  
Here's what we ask as we sing.....

***melt me.***

Melt me....

Complete confession.

Complete surrender.

Complete dropping of any pretense of strength or wisdom or authority.

And **ONLY** then, after the melting

*Spirit of the Living God - mold me, fill me, use me.*

That's the Biblical pattern.  
Let's read another example of it.

### LUKE 5:1-11, P.62 (NT)

People sometimes say that this is a passage about evangelism.  
Not true.  
It is a passage about the power of God invading human lives.

Frustrated Simon on the lake,  
with an empty boat.  
Puts down the nets - and WHAM they're full.

Now, he knows that he doesn't deserve this gift.  
If he were to receive what he **deserved** from the Lord.....  
....well, it certainly wouldn't be this generous.

Simon is fully aware of how human he is.  
He knows about his impulsive character, his quick mouth, and limited courage.

Yet there it - a hyperabundant blessing.  
The one who is in control of creation, controls the very schools of fish right under that little boat. Beyond just controlling them, He generously dumps them into the laps of the fishermen.

The power of God, radiating through Jesus the Son, has poured blessings into their imperfect, empty lives - lives that were symbolized so nicely in the empty boats and empty nets.

The power that guided the cloud formations over the lake, sprouted seeds and put leaves on trees, changed the seasons, guided the spawning cycles of the fish and moved the schools around the lake and into the net —  
— **that** power was concerned about little Simon,  
was on his side,  
wanted his help.

It's an overwhelming thing to have God grab hold of your life.  
Not something anyone anticipates.  
Certainly not something we deserve.  
Hence Simon's plea, *Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.*

But it's also an amazingly **gracious** thing to have God grab hold of your life.  
Which is why Jesus responds to Simon with the lovely words:  
*Do not be afraid.*

The holy Son of God doesn't break into Simon's life with power because of a desire to break him, damage him or crush him.

Jesus comes to draw Simon up into His holy, redeeming, restoring **love**.

And it is then, drawn into God's love and providing care, that Simon receives a call from Jesus.

See that?

Jesus doesn't call when there is no provision.

He first reveals Himself into Simon's life as the One who can provide whatever is needed -

- and WAY more besides -

and do it from sources that no one could have predicted

He reveals to Simon that this lake, which seemed so empty,  
was, in fact, chock full of fish.

And **then** -

as that providing, generous, gracious God

He issues a call to follow Him.

Pilgrims of faith - That same Jesus comes into our lives, too.

He comes as the One who gives.

Generously.

Abundantly.

I don't deserve to have God present in my life any more than Simon does.

But, like Simon, I receive it.

And so do you.

In fact, God is with us right here

this morning.

Right now!

And into the empty nets of our lives, He pours provisions.

Into the futility of our lives, he pours His power.

And with that issues a call.

To follow Him in service.

To share with other people the amazing message that God has provisions for them, too.

Do you see that?

Can you see God's providing Hand at work in your life?

Or do you feel like Simon in the middle of the night - working, working, working but not getting any results? The nets of your life keep coming up empty.

The Lord had to let Simon go through that whole period of frustration before he'd be ready to receive the full impact of how generous and full the care and provisions of God are.

His muscles had to ache.

He had to be tired, maybe even slamming the gunwales once or twice in frustration.

Fully aware of how futile and empty his own efforts were — only **THEN** was God able to fill the nets full to overflowing.

Sometimes that happens in our lives, too.

God has to let us go through a season, or maybe even multiple seasons, of futility and emptiness before we are in a position where we're ready to respond properly to Him pouring blessings into our lives.

Someone said to me once - after having gone through a rather long difficult period in their life where they **really** struggled in particular ways - they said in what was a huge moment of honest self-reflection:

*I think God had to keep me way out there on a very thin branch. If things had been more comfortable, I probably wouldn't have become so totally dependent on Him.*

Here - do you notice anything peculiar about how Luke refers to Simon through the course of the narrative?

There's **one** place where he's **not** called "Simon." Did you catch it?

V. 7 - see what he's called there?

***Simon Peter.***

Later in the gospel, he is referred to exclusively as *Peter*.

Before this point, exclusively as *Simon*.

This event, in Luke's telling, is a time of transition for the fisherman.

*Peter* is a name that means *Rock*.

And, in fact, that is what Simon becomes.

He is one of the central followers of Jesus and becomes a key figure in the life of the early church.

He is truly a *rock*.

Where is that rock strength found?

Where in this story is *Simon* the *Peter* figure?

V.7 - when he's on his knees confessing his own weakness, and the greatness of Jesus.

When he sees how small he is and how big Jesus is.

When he sees how empty his bag of tricks is, and how inexhaustibly rich the resources of heaven are.

***That's*** what becomes the bedrock foundation for Simon.

***That's*** when the call can come.

Not before.

Now, for Simon the call comes in a form that he readily identifies with -  
- the whole fish thing.

As one person put it,

If Simon was a consultant, Jesus would have said, "You will help people sort out their problems."

If Simon was an athlete, Jesus would have said, "You will win for Jesus Christ."

If Simon was a soldier, Jesus would have said, "You will overcome the enemy and protect the innocent."

If Simon was a cook, Jesus would have said, "From now on you will cook eternal food."

If Simon was a teacher, Jesus would have said, "You will change the minds of people and teach eternal truths."

How would Jesus call you?

*"Don't be afraid; from now on you will be reprogramming people....."*

or

*"Don't be afraid; from now on you will be designing new life policy for people....."*

Used by Jesus to enter the lives of others, build contacts with them, and draw them to the Lord.

Isaiah was called out as a prophet.

Simon was called to be a leader in the Church.

What is God calling you to be?

Perhaps you are also called to be a prophet, or a church leader.

Or perhaps you are being called to serve as volunteer at an inner city mission or a soup kitchen.

Perhaps you are being called to engage the political process and be an advocate for social justice.

Your call may be to serve as light and salt in the world of business management.

Or to be a voice for Christ in the sphere of education.

Or a listening ear of love to another parent on your block.

Or a friend for someone pushed away by others in your class.

One thing is for sure - God will call you to something.

The life of a believer is never static.

It is never about just warming a pew.

Those who encounter the power of God in their lives come alive.

They do **NOT** stay fixated on their sin.

They live in service for the Lord.

Like Isaiah, they wave at heaven and say, "Pick me! Pick me!"

Like Peter - they are willing to leave everything and followed Jesus.

As do we.

Aware – yes, oh so aware of our sin.

But then being touched by a coal from the altar.

Only - This coal is a living coal.

It is the Son of God who was the great sacrifice.

Laying His life on the altar of the cross.

And rising from that cross,

personally touching all who surrender to Him.

And as He touches us

- cleansing us.

Preparing us for new ways of service.

Preparing us so that we can say....

*"Here am I.*

*Send me."*