



“The Call to Preach”

Idea: Preaching is not so much a profession as it is a calling.

Intro: *¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. – Ephesians 4:11-14*

Paul’s words here to the church in Ephesus remind us that the Lord chooses and gives to His church spiritual leaders who shepherd. They feed, guide, and protect the people of God, so they might grow up to maturity in Christ. Today, we are going to step away from our sermon series to do something special in the life of both our church and one of our pastors. We are going to recognize and affirm the gift God has given to our church by ordaining Nate West to the preaching ministry. He has served as our Associate Pastor of Students for the last two and a half years.

Inquiry: It has been a while since we have ordained someone, so it is likely that some of you have not witnessed an ordination service. You might be wondering, “What is ordination?” It is the process whereby the local church expresses its affirmation of the calling of God upon the life of the preacher. Every denomination acknowledges God’s call and approval of those who preach and lead in different ways. In many churches and denominations, the first step is to license the man to the preaching ministry. Later, the license is followed by ordination.

In a Southern Baptist church, a license means, “You tell us God has called you into full-time Christian ministry and we believe you.” An ordination means, “We have had time to observe you, and we also believe God has called you to the vocational preaching ministry.” The first says, “We believe you believe it;” the latter says, “We believe it because we see it.” A couple years ago, we as a church licensed Nate to preach, believing he believed he was called by God to preach. Today, we are ordaining him to the preaching ministry, believing he is called because we have seen evidence of that call.

Thankfully, those whom God calls He gifts and equips for the work of ministry. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. In other words, God does not change His mind about planning to use the individual. He intended to do so before birth (Jer 1:5). Likewise, God does not make mistakes, so He never calls the wrong person. The ordination process is a way for the church to express its affirmation of God’s calling of the preacher. With that said, I want to briefly talk about a man’s call to preach before we lay hands on Nate and prayer over Joanna and him.

Read Isaiah 6:1-13.

Chapter 6 records a pivotal turning point in Judah’s history and marks the beginning of a new era for Isaiah as God’s preacher. Many questions about the nature and significance of God’s unusual meeting with Isaiah are left unanswered, but its formative impact on the thinking of the prophet is evident through his writings. The experience of having a glimpse of the majesty of God’s glory dramatically impacted Isaiah’s theology and preaching, which caused him to understand God’s calling for his life.

The prophet would lean on his calling throughout his preaching ministry because those days would prove to be very difficult. Nothing has changed for God’s preacher. Outside of assurance of personal conversion to Christ, no other spiritual conviction will help God’s man in his journey more than a firm conviction that God has called

him to preach. Preaching, whether it be as a senior pastor, a student pastor, or an evangelist, is not so much a profession as it is a calling. Young men often ask their pastors how they can know that God is calling them to preach and that they are not just following their own aspirations. Thankfully, the Bible has clear instructions on God's call and the gifts that accompany this call.

Isaiah 6 is one of those clear passages that speak to God's call on a man to preach. Isaiah was an adult when he was called to be a prophet, speaking for God to the people of Judah. In many ways the Protestant approach to the preaching ministry is built on God's call to Isaiah. Let's look at three aspects of this call.

1. Is a definite call. (vs. 1-4)

Isaiah was a volunteer, but he was only so in response to the call of God upon him. These verses make it clear that his call was a definite one. It was so definite that it was dated, "*in the year that King Uzziah died.*" History tells us that this took place in 740BC. King Uzziah had reigned over Judah for fifty-two years. He was the only king Isaiah had ever known, and he had been a wonderful and righteous king for the people of the southern kingdom (2 Chron 26). It was in that pivotal year that Isaiah experienced the Lord and was called to preach. He experienced the Lord in a fresh and unforgettable way, so there was no way to doubt his call.

There are two things worth noting about Isaiah's experience.

□ A Divine Experience

Isaiah "*saw the LORD*" (vs. 1). In many ways, there is a close parallel between a man's conversion to Christ and his call to preach. Both are datable. Many things work together leading up to those moments, but both are definite and datable experiences. You may not know the exact calendar date of either experience, but you should be able to describe approximately when, where, and under what circumstances both happened.

Example: I was drawn to faith in Christ on April 24, 1997. It was a Thursday, and I gave my life to Christ while at work that afternoon. I answered the call to preach on February 7, 1999, during the evening service at church. I had sensed the Lord's call for a few months, and that evening I yielded to it.

In both experiences, I vividly remember sensing God's presence and movement in my life. Isaiah had a divine experience with God, whereby he was called to preach. There is a second thing worth noting.

□ An Awesome Experience

As we read the rest of verse one through verse four, we see just how awesome of an experience it was. Lest we think he simply had an emotional experience; Isaiah describes the physical nature of his experience. He describes the throne room of God, the angels, the voices, the physical feelings, the sights, and the smells. It was a moving and real experience as he witnessed mighty angels declaring the holiness of God.

Isaiah was called to preach through this awesome experience of God's divine holiness. The setting of this calling reminds the preacher, that he is called to a greater vision and a deeper experience with God. We dare not take this calling lightly or presumptuously.

The call to preach is a definite call.

2. Is a convicting call. (vs. 5-7)

It would seem the closer the preacher comes to God, the cleaner and holier he would feel. Verse 5, however, gives us the opposite impression. When Isaiah experienced the divine presence of God, his response was to say, “*Woe is me!*” Seeing God for who He is caused him to see himself as he was, sinful.

The call to preach does not make a man feel any more holy than the call to salvation does. The reality is that the closer you move toward God, the brighter the light is and the more you see yourself as sinful. Isaiah was deeply convicted of his sinfulness.

Two things worth noting here in relation to the call:

- A Feeling of Unworthiness
No man should feel worthy to be called to preach. The reason for this is because preachers are sinners too. We see our woeful failure to live up to the holy and righteous standards of God. As we study God’s Word and prepare to share with the people of God, many times we are absolutely overwhelmed by how unworthy we are to handle such holy words. So, how can we live out our calling?

- An Assurance of Atonement
In this great vision, one of the angels standing above God’s throne flew over to the altar. He took a red-hot coal from the altar and cauterized Isaiah’s lips, cleansing him from sin.

As the preacher contemplates his calling, there is an overwhelming sense of unworthiness due to sin. However, thanks to Jesus Christ the preacher’s sin has been atoned for on the cross. The debt was paid, and he is now clean of all sin.

The call to preach is a convicting call. Each day, the preacher, living out his call, holds these two realities in tension. Both are true. The preacher feels the conviction of his calling, knowing he is both unworthy but rejoicing that his sin has been removed.

3. Is a sending call. (vs. 8-13)

As Isaiah experiences God’s presence, he is convicted and knows his inadequacies, yet when God issues a call for someone to go, he answers and commits himself. The same is true for the man who is called to preach today. This call is a sending call, requiring commitment from the preacher. There are three commitments worth noting:

- A Commitment to Go
Isaiah immediately volunteered. Today, I want to remind you of your calling and what you sign up for. When you answered God’s call to preach, you were committing to go wherever God would send you and do whatever He told you to do. Sadly, I have known many so-called ministers who were willing to go where God sent them as long as it fit a certain geographical region, a certain size church, or a ministerial niche.

Not so with Isaiah. He quickly said, “*Here I am! Send me.*” Be committed to go with God where He sends you.

- A Commitment to Proclaim
God gave Isaiah his marching orders. He was to “*Go and say...*”. The call to vocational gospel ministry is a call to preach. It does not matter if your primary ministry area is children, students, small groups, music, or administration. You have been called and gifted to the church to “*equip*

the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). You do this primarily through preaching and teaching.

- A Commitment to Persevere
“*How long, O Lord?*” – Is 6:11

Ministry is wonderful. I cannot imagine doing anything else with my life. There is nothing more enjoyable and fulfilling than standing before the church weekly and preaching God’s Word. It is a blessing to lead and develop people. Many days ministry feels easy, but some are hard and trying. It is in those seasons that the preacher must remember his calling and persevere through it.

You do so because you have been sent. The call to preach is a sending call.

Conclusion: The preacher tends to the flock, caring for the spiritual welfare of God’s people. They also teach the flock, feeding a steady diet from the richness of God’s Word. These work in tandem to develop and grow the church into maturity and the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13).

Church, are you grateful for this gift He has given to us? I know I am thankful for the pastors the Lord has used to influence my life. I have been tremendously blessed by the ministry of Dr. Ronnie Floyd, Dr. Johnny Hunt, Brett Pitman, and Dale Thompson.

Now, that we understand what this moment is about, let’s recognize and celebrate God’s gifts to His church by ordaining Nate to the preaching ministry.