

**Christ Community Covenant Church
The Beginning of the End . . . The Story Chapter 16
Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 22, 2012**

Perhaps you remember the so called love decade of the 60s, or perhaps you studied it in school and dressed up as a hippy for school or for Halloween. Maybe you remember this song:

*There is nothing you can do that can't be done
Nothing you can sing that can't be sung
Nothing you can say but you can learn how to play the game
It's easy.*

Of course that is *All you need is love* - John Lennon wrote it and the Beatles sang it. I think it would be the love decade anthem.

Well I was there and it wasn't so much about love as we remember. Devastating race riots that were a part of the Civil Rights movement (Chicago Democratic convention), political unrest and war protests due to the controversy of the Vietnam War (Kent State shooting), skyrocketing drug use all pretty much discredited the "*All you need is love*" part of the 60s. There was a lot of unrest and a lot of distrust. The Free Speech youth movement had a phrase that was coined by Jack Weinberg a student at Berkley University, "Don't trust anyone over thirty." Still probably pretty good advice. It was a rough time with lots of angst and not very much trust and faith. 'Hope' was on life support.

Then this magazine cover appeared on Easter weekend in April of 1966.

Time magazine cover April 8, 1966 – Is God Dead?

It was the first time that there wasn't a photo of a person on the cover and it was one of the most widely read magazines of its time. They received more letters to the editor in two weeks than any magazine total before. The magazine article wasn't really saying God is dead but was noting that it was hard to see God in the tapestry of life during that turbulent time. Troubling, if you read the article you would find out that noted theologians of the day, presidents of seminaries and pastors of very large churches were expressing not only doubt but professing a new religion that didn't need a personal God at all. With the death of hope comes the natural inclination to imagine that the Author of Hope must be dead too.

Same thing must have been going on in about 720 BC. The Northern nation of Israel had been overrun and ransacked by the massive Assyrian army, the ten tribes scattered to the mid eastern desert dust, never to be seen again. It must have seemed to the little surviving nation of Judah as though the hope of God's promises of God establishing a nation that will bless all nations was lost. Maybe they thought that the worst possible thing had happened.

You think the worst has happened . . . Turns out not by a long shot!

It turns out the nation of Assyria advanced now to the doorstep of Judah, intending to do to them what had happened to their sister nation to the North. At that time Judah had one of her five good kings, a fellow by the name of Hezekiah. Perhaps he was not fully aware that God really only needed the tribe of Judah to satisfy His promise because the promised messiah was from that tribe. Hezekiah was one of the heroes of the Bible for following after God, but still it must have been hard with the entire army of some 200,000 Assyrians on the doorstep of Jerusalem. I wouldn't have been too surprised if he was wondering...

Is God dead? Or does He just not care about me?

Maybe you are having one of those seasons where it seems like God is dead or at least missing in action. I know of three young moms in our congregation taking care of small children and they don't have the finances to keep their children in diapers and good food. They are doing all they can but they feel lonely and alone. I know of many others who have had wave after wave of hardship of all forms. Even the most stout hearted of the faithful have wavered under difficult circumstances. We all need reassurance at times. I am here to reassure you this morning, but I will have help from God.

One of the most famous prophets of the Old Testament was alive during this time, his name was Isaiah. Perhaps he too was wondering 'was God dead' or if maybe God was just done with this disobedient nation? Then on page 224 of the story we read of this amazing account of God breaking through to Isaiah with power and hope:

Isaiah 6:1-6

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,
The whole earth is full of His glory."

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said,

"Woe is me, for I am ruined!

Because I am a man of unclean lips,

And I live among a people of unclean lips;

For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth *with it* and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."

Then 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!"

What Isaiah saw . . . "I saw the Lord seated on the throne lofty and exalted"

Isaiah 6:1-3

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Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,

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God is Alive and in Control

First, Isaiah saw in no uncertain terms that God is *alive*. King Uzziah is dead, but God lives on. The Northern Kingdom is dead but God lives on. Other prophets have been killed, but God lives on. The psalmist said, "From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2). God was the living God when this universe banged into existence. He made the first star live and he watched it fizzle out and die a ten billion years later. He was the living God when Socrates drank his poison. He was the living God when Nathan Hale died a hero of the revolutionary war and when Hitler took the coward's way out in WWII. He was the living God when Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "Where has God gone?" "I shall tell you. We have killed him - you and I." Now Fred is dead and

God is still on His throne. He was the living God in 1966 when *Time* magazine wondered about and he will be living in ten trillion ages. There is not a single head of state in all the world who still be in power in 70 years, probably fifty. The turnover in world leadership is 100%. In a brief 110 years this planet will be populated by 14 billion brand new people and all 8 billion of us alive today will have vanished off the earth like Uzziah. But not God. He never had a beginning and therefore depends on nothing for his existence. He always has been and always will be *alive*.

But He is not just alive - He is in power. "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne." No vision of heaven has ever caught a glimpse of God fixing His car or cutting his grass or shining shoes or filling out reports or loading a truck. Heaven is not coming apart at the seams. God is never at wit's end wring His hand with his realm. He does not pace. He sits and rules His realm. And he sits on a throne. All is at peace and he has control.

The throne represents His right to rule the world. We do not give God authority over our lives. He has it whether we like it or not. It is utter folly to act as though we had any rights at all to call God into question! We need to hear now and then blunt words like those of Virginia Stem Owens who once wrote in the *Reformed Journal*.

"Let us get this one thing straight. God can do anything he damn well pleases, including damn well. And if it pleases him to damn, then it is done, ipso facto, well."

God's activity is as He pleases. As we have said, His will is sovereign and it will happen. Calling God dead won't make it so. So I wonder, how does someone respond to such a vision? What Isaiah felt was devastation;

What Isaiah felt . . . 'I am ruined'

Isaiah 6:5-6

"Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

God is Holy and I am not (but God has a plan for that)

Isaiah is undone because he has once and for all been, in some mysterious way that we all cannot imagine, confronted with the holiness of God. To be in the room with absolute holiness and glory seems to be a 'disassembling' phenomenon.

The very god-ness of God means that he is separate from all that is not God. There is an infinite qualitative difference between Creator and creature. God is one of a kind. Latin for this is "Sui generis" – "In a class by himself." The Bible lets us know in no uncertain terms:

"There is none holy like the Lord, there is none besides thee." 1 Samuel 2:2,
"To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One." Isaiah 40:25,
"I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst." In the end God is holy in that he is God and not man. Hosea 11:9,
"The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." Habakkuk 2:20

"I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips." That is an interesting quote. I think what he is saying is that nothing that has ever been said, nothing that has ever been heard gives God enough credit. All is sin, all of us are undone.

But God has a plan for our helpless state. With a plea, God comes to our aid, sending an angel to bring a coal from the temple's unending fire and purifies Isaiah. It is the burning love of Christ that purifies and cleanses us from ourselves and our choices to deny God.

What Isaiah said . . . "Here am I, send me."

Isaiah 6:8

Then 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!"

God is inviting. Are you coming?

Are you coming, coming to the table of His presence where you can serve and be served? You see God is not dead! He wants you to come, to seek Him and find rest. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

In Isaiah chapter 53, 700 years before the Jesus our Savior would suffer and die so that we could be at rest, wrote of this same Jesus. You read of it on page 228 and 229 of the Story. The Savior who suffered so that we could find rest. The nation of Judah longs for hope. just like we so often do. God gives them the hope of a messiah and then two chapters later Isaiah writes perhaps the most full of hope verse in all of his prophecies:

Isaiah 55:1-3

"Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;

and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

God says, every one who thirsts, come to the waters – the loving waters that flow from the throne of God. Then God says he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come and buy – How do you buy when you have no money? You see there is a transaction that must happen before you eat. Money or good deeds are of no use at this table. This feast cost the Savior His life, it will cost you yours too. But this life was never your own, you simple must give to God what is already His and you can eat and rest. This banquet is for those who have exchanged their lives for His. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. All of the God's bidding fall into these four steps:

1. Come,
2. Buy,
3. Eat,
4. Enjoy.

I guess as it turns out, all you do need is love.