

Transcript of Sermon By
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 First Baptist Church
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The Calling of the Prophet

Isaiah 6:1-8

Meditation Text:

The Bible and saints who have gone before us give ample evidence of God's consistent call to each of us. The Bible and the saints who have traveled this road before us also make clear the universal nature of God's call to all humankind. No one is left out, exempted, or overlooked. All are of equal worth and all are called. While we may think of certain vocations as callings, God appears to consider all of life as our calling, and that includes every honorable vocation.

—from *A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God*

I am sure at your house if you or someone in your family has been to college or graduate school that you get a number of alumni magazines that are mailed out monthly or quarterly. They are trying to keep you in touch with the school and remind you of what is going on. When you get that, what is the first thing you look for? Is it the cover story on the \$50 million campaign for the library? I don't read it at all. I usually go to the class notes or the alumni happenings--those columns in the back where they tell what all the people are doing, who's moved, who's gotten married, who's passed away. The next time you get one of these magazines or read one at someone else's house you will see two verbs that appear regularly in those write-ups. One of those verbs is *accepted*. You see things like: *Sam Smith has accepted a position with such and such company where he will be assistant regional sales manager.*

The other verb is *named*. *Sara Smith was named executive vice president at a big company where she will tell a lot of people what to do and make a boat-load of money.* That is the way those things read. It is kind of subtle. You have to read between the lines but it is there.

Those two verbs represent an approach to what people think they should do with their lives. For lack of a better word, I call it the *market approach*. It is based on the job market. What does the job market say? What does the job market want? What will the job market support? Things like ambition, position, title, career track, salary, and success, are all a part of this approach to considering what it is people might do, want to do, or think they should do with their lives.

In my opinion, this is only half the story. We get our ammunition or fuel for this from things like *Money Magazine* and *USA Today* where they do the annual report on where the best jobs in America are? It might tell you what the job growth looks like in certain professions, what the starting salary might be, or where in the country you can go and get one of these jobs where they are really hot. The decisions are based upon the job market. Again, it is good, I think, as far as it goes but I think it is only half the picture.

If I had the influence, I would like to add one more verb that might be used in these kinds of things because it would reflect what I think is the other half, the half that is left off. That verb would be *called*. What would it be like to pick up the alumni magazine and see a snippet on somebody that says, *Jane Doe has been called to the health care profession and will serve in _____*. *John Doe is called to work with teenagers and will teach English in _____*. That is a different mindset than if all we think about is the job market.

I want to tell you four things that will help you to understand if something is a calling in your life.

1. It has to be based on the needs of others. We sit around and say things like, *I don't know what I am going to do but I would really like to make a difference. If I am going to make a job change, I would really like to have a job that changes things*. Those kinds of things come from the needs of others. If I am going to make a difference and change things, it means there is something that needs changing, a difference that needs to be made, and it is based on something that is lacking in somebody else's life.

2. It is based on a dream or an aspiration. It is more than a simple decision that says, *I think there is a really good market for physical therapists and that is what I want to do*. But what if there is a dream? What if it is something you cannot voice to other people because people might think you were just a little off? This is something that you see yourself doing and there is a reason behind it—a dream, an aspiration.

3. If it is based on a dream that sometimes we are afraid to tell other people about, I think there is often reluctance. *No that couldn't be me. I am not sure I would ever have that opportunity. I don't know that I would ever have the right gifts. I am not the right person*.

4. Then there is the voice of God. People experience this differently. I have known people who would almost say in their lives that they heard something. Something was so clear to them that it was as if the voice of God spoke. Just like in a movie, the voice of God just spoke to them and they knew what they were supposed to do. However, for the majority of people, I think it is a little different. In many people's lives, it is experienced as a nudge, a poke or a prod, something that moves us from this step to that step. Then one day, we find ourselves at the threshold of something, we turn around and we look at all the things that have brought us to a certain place, and we realize, *This has been God's hand*. God has brought us to this place. This is what God wants us to do.

There is a difference between being named, having accepted, or being called to something. There is a difference between choosing something because the job market says so or

choosing something because it sounds like it would be a good profession and choosing something because you want to do for other people. It is a vision that you just can't quite shake out of your mind and sometimes there is even a reluctance and you know, even if you are afraid to admit it to yourself or to people around you for fear that you will sound a little goofy, that God's hand and voice have been nudging you.

The passage from Isaiah 6 is really one of the great passages in scripture. It is probably the primary place where we look in scripture and see what happens in a person's life when they are called. Of course, Isaiah has this wonderful vision of how majestic God is—*holy, holy, holy*. In so many languages, you repeat something three times to say, *It is the most*. If you get dessert at somebody's house and they ask you, *Is it good?* You say, *It is good, good, good*. How many times do you repeat something more than three times? It is a natural thing to repeat something three times.

Isaiah has a vision of God, and then it begins to dawn on him that there is a need to speak to the people. The people need to hear this word from God. Isaiah is beginning to consider it and says, *Woe is me! I am undone*. It is just like a package has been broken open and ruined. I have unclean lips and I live amongst a people of unclean lips. But God takes care of it and finally says, *Who will go for us? Who shall we send?*

Having heard the voice, Isaiah has nothing left to say but, *Here am I; send me*. There is this compulsion that won't let you do otherwise.

Once a month for the past five or six months, we have been taking a Sunday out of the month and have been looking at our 175-year-old heritage. The way this service was originally supposed to go was to think about people in our heritage who have been called to ministry and celebrate that and there are many just among the folks that we would know.

The Roebucks' son, Jon, is a pastor in Nashville. Gwen Stephens who was interim music minister before we called Keith ten years ago has given her life. In addition to teaching, she is now leading music at North Broad Baptist Church. Some of you may remember Matt Winn. Matt was a very successful businessman, and in the middle of life, felt God's call and said there was something else he was supposed to do. Since then, he has been the executive minister of one of the largest Methodist churches in Tennessee. His family is going to China to do mission work and now probably going to yet another continent. Lauren Colwell is at First Baptist Church in Savannah. Janet Williams spent several months in Asia and now works with a foundation here to try to bring about understanding between people of different faiths.

If you go back through history, there are names that none of us would recognize but there has been a long 175-year history of people coming forth because God has spoken. More important than the history, I think, is the future. Where comes the next generation? In 20 years, who will preach to the next generation of people who serve and worship in this church? In the next 15 years, who will come and lead children that they might develop in their faith. In the next 20 years, who will come and lead youth? Who will lead us in education? The ministry of the church marches on, and the question is, *Will God call you?* Half the people whose names I

mentioned earlier responded at a place in life where they were already doing something else. Would God call you?

One of the quickest things we say is, *Not everybody can go*, which immediately gives everybody an out. Some people need to go. Some people for whom it is in the back of their hearts and are afraid to admit to themselves or to family members need to say, *I own up to it. God is talking to my heart.*

Thanks to the Protestant Reformation, it is not just about ministry. When Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation came along, calling was only about ministry and that is something we do want to emphasize. After the Protestant Reformation, calling was about any honorable vocation, any honorable job.

One of the great things about this congregation over 175 years is that there are people invested in the community in as many different types of things that it would take us an hour to name them all. People who do things because they believe that is what God has led them to do in their lives and their influence, as Christians, is beyond the walls of the church because they have a calling in something—medicine, health care, or caring for others. They have a calling in business. They have a calling because they have this strong sense that God has led them to develop a business where people can have good lives, where they can nurture employees, and where people can rise to do their best. We can probably all name some of these. In any profession that you want to name, there are people within church who have felt that God has led them to do it. The strength of this church over 175 years is ministers who have been called to serve God full time and people who are called by God to go live out their professions in all the different avenues to spread the influence of Christ throughout this community.

So today, the call is twofold. The call is to ministry. Have you ever considered that God might need you or someone in your family in his work full time? I am not going to give you the out and say, *Well, you don't have to worry about it.* I do know it is not for everybody, but if it is for you, then maybe you and I need to have a conversation. Maybe it is time to begin to think forward on that.

If you are in an honorable profession, I would like you to have words to put on it to understand that the compulsion you feel by God is your calling. It is what God has asked you to do--to try to go forward from this, to branch out so that it is not just accidental but intentional. The way that you live your life, conduct your business, and work in your profession is a part of who you are as a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ.

I don't read a lot in sermons, but I read this a couple of years ago, and I think this is worth reading here. It is from *A Guide to Prayer For All God's People*. "Already in your past life and from time to time, God has whispered into your heart a very wonderful thing--whatever it is that he is wishing for you to be and to do--and that wonderful thing is nothing less than your calling. Nothing less than that. The most secret, sacred wish that lies deep down at the bottom of your heart, the wonderful thing that you hardly dare to look at or think about, the thing that you would rather die than have anyone else know of because it seems to far beyond anything that you are or have at the present time, that you fear you would be cruelly ridiculed if the mere

thought of it were known, that is just the very thing God is wishing for you to do and be for him, and the birth of that marvelous wish in your soul, the dawning of your secret dream was the voice of God himself telling you to arise and come up higher. He has need of you.”

Then I heard him say, ‘Whom shall I send and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me.’

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