

## **The Vision of a Christian Leader**

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Isaiah 6  
Leadership

This morning I am going to start a new brief series on a topic that I have wanted to teach on for quite some time and that is the topic of Christian leadership. You know, over the years as a pastor, I have done a tremendous amount of reading in both secular books as well as Christian books on the subject of leadership. I think about leadership all the time and am continually talked to about my own leadership by many of you as well as by folks outside this church. And I am continually talked to about other leaders in this church, on the pastoral staff, or the small group or ministry level leaders.

Now, I also hear about the experience that people have had with Christian leaders in other church settings. And what I have discovered is that this is a really, really sensitive point for many people. Many people have experienced Christian leadership in a mainly negative way. Many people don't trust Christian leaders because they have been abused or used—ripped off. And in a week or two I am going to talk about dangerous leaders, abusive leaders and the biblical marks of leaders that we need to be careful around.

But today what I would like to do is start this series on leadership on a more positive note and talk about the vision of a Christian leader. There probably are few things more central to leadership, in general, and Christian leadership in particular, than the issue of vision. Vision is crucial to any Christian endeavor. Whether you are a leader of a kinship or a leader of a food pantry or a leader of an AIDS ministry or a leader in world missions organizations or a leader in children's church, whatever you do as a Christian leader, you quickly discover that without vision your ministry will, at some point, plateau and fall off. A vision is simply what the leader sees as the preferred future for the ministry they lead. Here's where we are – but we can be more. We can be different. We can be better. Here's what I see in the future for us as individuals and as a group.

Now there are dozens of reasons why a leader needs vision. Vision provides motivation for individuals to get involved in a ministry. If you are a leader and you have not articulated the vision of your organization, your ministry, your group—where are we going, what are we hoping to do, what the future will hold for the church—you will find a really low level of motivation for group members.

Whenever somebody comes along and says, "You know, most of the folks that are involved in my group or in this ministry just seem to be apathetic and they are no longer coming and there seems to be really low moral,." one of the first things that I would ask the person is "What is your vision and what have you communicated regarding the reason why people ought to come to the meeting?" Before a leader preaches commitment at someone and says, "Well you need to be committed. You need to be committed. You need to be committed." I would say, "Well, why should they be committed?" How compelling is your vision?

If people don't have motivation to be involved, perhaps it is because the leader's picture of the future for this ministry is not really very compelling. We need vision to be motivated.

We need to cultivate a vision before we ask people to give money. As a Christian leader involved in a church, how can we ask people to give when they don't know what the church is about? What are your goals? Where are you going? People need to believe in the direction of a church or a ministry before they give.

Vision is essential for unity. Without a vision, Proverbs says, "People cast off restraint." There is disunity. And whenever you see lots of conflict and people running in a bunch of different directions, you know that the vision either has not been clearly articulated or if it has, the vision is not owned by the people.

Vision is crucial for evaluating. You know, John Wimber is fond of saying that churches play ministry the way that men play fantasy basketball. No hoops, no ball—but we feel so good at pretending that we are putting the ball in the hoop. Unless you have a picture of what it is that you are aiming at, where you are going, you won't know whether you are ever getting there or how to evaluate the success or lack of success of your ministry.

And particularly among Christians we can be so subjective in the way that we measure whether we are doing all right. You know, we do evangelism programs and at the end of them everyone is very positive and says, "Wasn't this wonderful?" Even though no one has embraced Christ as Lord and Savior. But we have had a good time.

So there are lots of reasons why a Christian leader needs to have a vision regarding where their ministry is going and what God's end in mind is for that particular person in ministry. Vision is a target that beckons people. It is a future state that doesn't now exist, but could exist if we all got behind it. Like John F. Kennedy's statement that by the end of this decade we are going to put a man on the moon. Or the founder of Coca-Cola who said that "my vision is that every single person on the planet will, before they die, taste Coca-Cola.

Now, if you read books on Christian leadership, as I have, you will immediately be told about the importance of a vision. You will be inspired to dare great things for God. To attempt great things for God. To believe great things for God. You will be told story after story regarding people who had to overcome tremendous obstacles in order to achieve their vision for God. Like Billy Graham who was told by his professors of preaching in college: "Son, one thing is certain – you will never be a preacher." Or Franklin Roosevelt who overcame polio. Or Demosthenes, the Greek orator, who overcame stuttering. Or Abe Lincoln who overcame poverty. I am like the rest of you; I am always encouraged by those things, inspired. They make me think about overcoming the obstacles in my life and the possibility of accomplishing great things for God.

Here is what I want to say to you today. Despite all of the reasons that I just listed regarding why you need a vision if you are a Christian leader, and despite all of the great stories about how people accomplished big things for God because of their vision for God, I want you to hear this. And this is something that I have not read in any of the Christian books, but I see it in the Bible. Before

a Christian can have a vision for God, the Christian leader must first have a vision of God.

The vision of a Christian leader does not start with what that Christian leader can accomplish for God or what the ministry can accomplish for God, what the church can do for God. The vision of a Christian leader begins with a vision of God.

And so this morning I want to do something that I haven't done very often. That is to look at a passage which I spoke on only about a year ago, Isaiah 6. And I am going to take a very different slant on the passage than I did when I previously preached on this. But my title is *The Vision of a Christian Leader*. Let's pray.

"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. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 'Woe is 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.' 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.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'"

Let me give you a little historical background on this passage before we look at the subject of today's talk, *The Vision of a Christian Leader*. Despite the fact that this chapter, chapter 6, comes after five chapters of prophecy, this actually was the beginning of Isaiah's ministry. The events recorded in chapter 6 reports his call to be a prophet. He just delays recording his calling until chapter 6 in the way, for example, Amos delays reporting on his calling until Amos chapter 7. So this chapter really could have been structured at the beginning of the book, Isaiah just chose to delay a report of his leadership beginnings until the 6th chapter.

In terms of Bible history, you know, the chronology of the kings is exceptionally difficult to work out. We don't exactly know when Uzziah began and ended his reign because some of the kings were functioning in co-regency i.e. there were two kings reigning at one time. And there are overlaps in the dating.

But Isaiah's calling probably took place somewhere around 740 BC and he says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." Uzziah was the king of Israel for a longer period of time than any other king in Israel's history. He was king for 52 years. He came to the throne during one of the very low points of Israel's political fortunes, after King Solomon. The nation at the beginning of Uzziah's reign was a mess militarily and economically.

The Lord prospered the nation under Uzziah's leadership. In fact, the borders of Israel extended as far as they ever did under Uzziah. Israel was larger than at any time since the days of King David and King Solomon.

Now, in the introduction I said that a Christian leader does not start with a vision for God, a Christian leader starts with a vision of God. And this is what we see in verse one.

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord."

Not what I could do for the Lord. I didn't first of all hear my calling to Christian service. I didn't see the needs all around me. I wasn't motivated first by the anguished cries of the lost. That is not where vision starts.

A Christian leader starts with a vision of God. And to express it a little differently, a Christian leader is someone who has gone to the well themselves. Who has personally dug and personally experienced God. A Christian leader is not someone who just hands out second-hand opinions regarding what someone else says about God. A Christian leader is not just someone who has read lots and lots of Christian books and has been able to synthesize the best thoughts of Charles Spurgeon or Chuck Swindoll or John Wesley. Or they have listened to all of John Wimber's tapes and they can rehash things for you. That is not Christian leadership.

A Christian leader is someone who speaks from personal experience. "I saw the Lord." That is what a Christian leader must be able to say.

The apostle John in speaking to Christian leaders in 1 John, when he speaks to those mature people in the church, he says in 1 John 2:13 and then he repeats the same thing in 1 John 2:14:

"I write to you fathers because you know him who is from the beginning."

A Christian leader speaks out of their own personal experiential base. Now, this doesn't mean that a Christian leader doesn't do a lot of reading or a lot of listening to tapes or a lot of listening to radio messages. But I like the way a pastor named Mike Bickle phrased it. He said that the Lord spoke to him one time and said, "Mike, I want you to be more than an echo. Mike, I want you to be more than an echo."

A Christian leader is not just an echo or a parrot that has been taught to simply copy the opinions of a pastor or this fellowship or a book. If that is all that you are able to do, you are not, yet, a Christian leader.

You see, the question for a Christian leader is what do you personally know of God? Don't talk to me about what the church life is supposed to be like. What somebody said should happen. What the correct answer should be. I don't want you to tell me something that has sort of a far off feeling to it. I want to know, do you live in the house that you are speaking from? Is this thing really your treasure? Because where your heart is there your treasure will be. Really, is what you are handing out your treasure?

And, boy, I don't know about you, but I can sure detect that far off quality as people give counsel. It is not what I have discovered and what I personally know. Again, there is nothing wrong with occasionally sharing insights from books and tapes and all of that. Sometimes, that is helpful. But that is not Christian leadership.

See, really most of what a Christian leader has begins and ends at this point. What is your vision of God? When you think about it, other organizations can out-spend the church. Other organizations can certainly out-administrate the church. Churches are not normally models of efficient organization. There are people who do not believe in Jesus Christ who are exceptionally bright and can out-think many, many Christian leaders.

What we have to offer is not necessarily the best of management, the best of entertainment, and the best of the arts. Why, then, would somebody go to a Christian leader? What does a person expect to see or to find when they come to take counsel from you as a Christian leader?

The reason why somebody goes to a Christian leader is because they want to know what you know of God. That is the question for you if you are a Christian leader or think of yourself as a Christian leader. Tell me what you know of God? What is he like? What is his character? What have you seen?

And the Christian leader is somebody who has had a personal experience of God recently. You know, I can tell with myself and I can certainly tell when I listen to other people that much of what they are speaking about may have happened to them, but it happened a long time ago.

“Yeah, I really experienced the Holy Spirit’s presence back in 1954.”

When your stories have that dated feel to it—the only thing that you can report is what God did through you or to you two years ago, or five years ago— “Yeah, the Lord really came when I shared my faith with someone” but that story is a really dated story, then you have to ask, “Am I really currently a Christian leader? Am I drinking today?”

Christian leadership starts with a vision of God. And that vision of God must be a fresh vision of God today, yesterday, this week, and this month.

And a Christian leader is someone who has a vision of God’s holiness. Isaiah says,

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.”

And then he goes on and describes what he sees of God. And what he sees of God in particular is God’s holiness.

“I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory.’”

This passage mentions angels flying around the throne of God. The text says that these were seraphs. In verse 2, “...above him were seraphs.” This is the only time that seraphs are mentioned in the scriptures. The name seems to be related to a word in Hebrew that means “burning fire” or “full of fire.”

So, it is thought that these beings that Isaiah saw appeared to be burning bright or full of fire. When you saw them, they glowed. They appear above the throne. And then below the throne the Bible says are the cherubim. That word “cherubim” may be related to an old near eastern Akkadian term meaning, “intercessor.” They seem to have some role in intercession and maybe in protection.

The Bible lists in something like 350 different passages, references related to angels, and so the seraphim are part of that hierarchy of angels. One thing that Isaiah sees, these particular angels veil their faces and cover their feet. God is so holy that even the angels cover their faces when they are in his presence. And they cover their feet out of modesty and humility.

A Christian leader has a vision of God's holiness. And in this particular case, the angels are actually crying out to one another in antiphonal way. It is almost like the responsive reading. One group of seraphim is shouting, "Holy," and then the other seraphim are shouting, "Holy"—back and forth, back and forth.

Why is it important for a Christian leader to have a vision of God's holiness? To be holy means, first of all, to be entirely in the right. Do you realize that God never has a reason to be ashamed about anything? He never has a cause for regret. He never looks back and says, "You know, if only I had done this thing or said this thing a little bit differently. You know, as I look over today and what I did today, I wish I would have said this just a little differently." You know, God never does that. He never looks back over a week or a month or a year or a century, and says, "If only I had intervened at this point, things could have been a lot different. I should have." There is none of that in God. No regrets. He is always, always, always doing and saying what is right. He never makes a bad decision. Pressure doesn't get to him and circumstances never crowd in where God gets pushed into making a decision that he doesn't want to make and it turns out to be a bad decision. Or that he doesn't put enough thoughts behind it.

Can you imagine going through a day or a week in which you could say, "All day not one wrong word come out of my mouth. Not one wrong thought passed through my mind. Not one wrong attitude was in my heart. Everything I did and said was and is entirely correct."

You say, "A day? I would like to have one moment like that!"

Let me assure you, you will. I will. The moment right after the doctor says, "Rich is dead." And I am transported into the presence of God – then I will be right.

But God is always right. In describing God's holiness, I think of that verse, "God is light and in him there is not darkness at all." Pure light without any dark motives, without any hidden agendas, completely clean.

And a Christian leader is someone who has, through personal experience, become convinced of the absolute rightness of God's ways, God's Words, God's character. A Christian leader is someone who says, "You know, I don't want to do, perhaps, what God is calling me to do because it is really difficult and I don't understand this. I am confused. And I don't get it. But as a result of my experience with God, I am convinced that God's way is right." What God does is right.

A Christian leader is someone who never feels the need to forgive God. "Well, you know, I have to forgive God." I hate that language. It is absolutely unbiblical. I may be upset with God. I may not understand what God wants, but I am never angry for a justifiable reason with God. I know that when all the facts are in, on the day when I stand before God and the veil is taken away from my eyes so that I can see the Lord clearly, and when I understand the entire plan, I know that I

am going to say along with every atheist, every sick person, every cancer victim, every poor person, every refugee, I know when all the facts are in and we really see God as he is, every creature in the universe is going to say, "You, O Lord, are entirely in the right and everything that you have ever done is right."

See, that is the confidence of a Christian leader. I know God never makes mistakes. Again, I may not understand. I am confused. I am hurt. I don't like this. But God knows what he's doing.

Putting it into a biblical framework, I think a Christian leader is one who has gone through at least some of what Romans 5 describes when it says, "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings. Because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope. And hope doesn't disappoint us."

A Christian leader just doesn't have that initial hope described at the beginning of the passage, "hope of sharing the glory of God," I hope that one day I will go to heaven. No. After going through some very painful times and seeing the rightness of God, a Christian leader comes out the other side with a mature hope. I know I am not going to be disappointed. Man, I have gone through the fire. But God has been faithful.

Now, holiness doesn't just mean that God is entirely in the right. It also means that God is entirely separate, completely different than us. A way to express God's holiness that some theologians like to use is "God is wholly other." God is completely different than people in their sinfulness, in their faithlessness, in their fickleness.

A Christian leader is someone who realizes that God is entirely different than us. And how that translates out is that when the Christian leader speaks to those that he or she is ministering to, they are not just handing out warmed over opinions of what everybody else in the world is already saying. It's not just the slogan of the month club or what's hot in pop psychology today. The voice of a Christian leader, the counsel, the words, they are different. Because the Christian leader has a vision of the holiness of God, the wholly otherness of God, the Christian leader knows that God's ways are not our ways and God's opinions are not our opinions. God's Word doesn't change decade to decade.

"Oh well, this is the 90's—get with it."

It doesn't matter if it is the 1990's or the 1890's; the Christian leader knows that God and his ways and his counsel don't change. We are not just warming up what the experts all think and then handing it out in Christianese. That is the language of Christians, by the way, Christianese. We take some popular opinion and wrap around a couple of spiritual sounding words and serve it to each other.

You pick up a Christian book and you ask yourself, "Is this person a Christian leader?" Consider whether that person is communicating a wholly otherness, a voice from the other side. Something that sounds as if it is from across the gulf. It doesn't just sound like what we project from this side up. This counsel is different.

A Christian leader starts with a vision of God. A Christian leader starts, in particular, with a vision of God's holiness. But, you know, a Christian leader is not just someone who has a vision of God or sees God. But a Christian leader is

also someone who sees himself or herself as Isaiah says, “At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips.’”

When Isaiah says in verse 4, “Woe to me!” he literally in Hebrew is saying, “Oy!” You have heard the expression, “Oy Vey!” It doesn’t mean “oh my,” “oh no.” It means “I am undone.” I am like a shirt that is unraveling at the seams. I am coming apart.

Let me put it this way. A Christian leader is someone who sees themselves, especially someone who sees their own sinfulness. Apart from seeing God, there is nothing more important for a Christian leader to see than their own sinfulness. And I would suggest to you that the present experience of our own sinfulness is the only thing that keeps a Christian leader safe. The present experience of my own sinfulness is the only thing that keeps me safe as a leader.

Paul in 1 Timothy 1 was a safe leader when he said, “I am the chief of sinners.” Not I was or I used to be a really bad guy. When you hear a Christian leader talk like that, “Years ago, before I had this wonderful conversion experience” or “Before I had this touch at the altar, I was a bad person.” No – it’s now, I am a sinful person! Woe to me! Oy Vey!

Don’t follow someone who doesn’t have a present vision of their sinfulness.

It’s because a person knows, right now, that there is something wrong in them. They are open regularly to confrontation. To accountability. To a challenge. To correction. When someone is not radically in touch with their own sinfulness, when they project themselves as always right, they are not safe as a Christian leader. You go to one of those unsafe leaders and you say, “You know, I am really concerned about this.”

And they will say, “When you use the word ‘concern,’ let’s define that. Webster suggests that the word ‘concern’ is not accurately used the way you are trying to apply it to me.”

“Correct me? I have nothing to have correct in me. However, let me share with you six things in your life that are wrong.”

“How dare you come to me when we all know about your brokenness and your problems and your sin?”

That is an unsafe leader. Putting it differently, a Christian leader is regularly someone who wants to see their sins, even though it is painful. To underline this, I would say a Christian leader is always someone who is moving toward the light rather than away from it. They are running toward exposure on a repeated basis and on a growing basis. “God show me more even though I know it is humiliating. Even though I hate to be embarrassed. Even though I hate to be confronted, God show me more.” But do it gently and ever so lovingly.

Someone who runs away from the light, away from exposure, away from confrontation is not worth following. They are not safe leaders.

The Christian leader can be a highly competent person, but they are not self-confident. Because when they look inside they say, “I am not really safe.” Apart from God and apart from what God is doing, apart from his blessing and apart from him opening his hand, I got nothing, I am nothing, I have nothing—and they live that way! And so they are able to apologize and they are able to admit faults.



And they work with checks and balances. They are folks who are able to challenge; people who are able to get on the inside. They refuse to be autonomous because they see the potential dangers of leaving themselves alone.

And you know the revelation, the vision; the seeing of my own sinfulness is one of the major reasons why I personally believe that Christianity is true. Let me give you a little parenthesis here, by way of a story.

During college, I think it was my junior year of college, I had been a Christian for about two years. And there was a period of about six months during my junior year of college where I went through a major crisis in my faith. And the crisis was precipitated circumstantially by a couple of things.

Number one, I was a religion major in college. After I made a decision to follow Jesus, I thought that I wanted to be a pastor and I was planning to go to seminary. I decided to be a religion major. One of my religion classes, the professor in the class, day after day, would point me out by name. He would point at me and he would say to the whole class, "But, of course, Mr. Nathan, over here, [and then he would call me 'his man of faith'—he would say:] But Mr. Nathan, over here, our man of faith, would probably say this... [and he would put words in my mouth and then he would say:]...but, we know that is incredibly idiotic for these reasons."

And so day after day, he would basically just hold me up to ridicule. He literally began this college class, a professor, well-known in his field, he literally began this religion class with this statement, "Anyone who is orthodox in their faith is almost certainly a failure either academically or sexually."

And then, on top of that, going to class like that every day, Marlene and I at the time, we had just gotten married and we were living next door to a fellow who was getting his Ph.D. in Philosophy. And who had been raised in a Christian home and had been taught all the arguments regarding why Christianity was true and had come to the place of rejecting it all. He was a very clever guy, as I said he was getting his Ph.D. in Philosophy. He would come over and basically punch holes in all of my arguments. He knew the arguments and how to dismantle the arguments, what the flaws in the arguments were.

And so, from these two sources as well as some personal problems that I had, I began saying to myself, "How do I really know that Christianity is really true?" Maybe I have just been playing a psychological game with myself. How do I know, really? I mean, you know, I came to believe in Jesus at a crisis point in my life and I was in need and this was held out as a hope. Maybe I have just convinced myself that all this is true and how do I know this?

And as I was working this through, and I am just telling you what helped me then, because I had read all the apologetics and evidence for this and evidence for that, and it felt kind of empty for me. But you know what lifted me out of my spiritual crisis? There was this one thing that I couldn't escape from—the sense, internally, of my own sinfulness. It occurred to me one day in the midst of the swirl of my doubts, that if this is just a psychological game, if all these so-called rules and laws that are supposedly coming down from God, if they are just man-made or self-created, then why can't I change the rules? In other words, if this is

just human, then why can't I convince myself, internally, that I really am a nice person and that my motives really are right and that I really do have a good heart?

But I saw, try as I might, that I was stuck with this continual feeling that I wasn't very nice, that I didn't have a good heart, that my motives really were impure. You know, I just couldn't shake the sense of my sinfulness.

You see, there is an experience, intuitively, that every human being on earth has that bears witness to the truthfulness of what the Bible says—the experience of our sinfulness. Again, if the rules are just artificial, then why can't we manipulate them and make ourselves feel perfectly right?

Now, of course, we all try to do that. But somewhere along the line the voice of God bleeds through. The things that God says that are wrong are written on our hearts in indelible ink. We try to scrub it out and wash it out and talk it out and use different words, but it bleeds through.

And, so, for me one of the bedrock foundation stones of my faith is an absolutely secure view that I am a sinner and that I need personally to be saved. I am more certain of my own crookedness than practically than I am of my own existence. God's holiness reveals my sinfulness at virtually every moment of internal reflection.

A Christian leader has a vision of God and his holiness. A Christian leader is someone who has a vision of their own sinfulness. And a Christian leader also is someone who has a vision of the condition of this world. Isaiah says,

“I am a man of unclean lips, [Oy Vey...and he goes on and says:]...and I live

among a people of unclean lips.”

A Christian leader is someone who is very much in touch and sees the condition of the world. There is not a naïveté. Lots of people think of Christian leaders as essentially blind to the real world, useless, bumbling and blind. A Christian leader sees. A Christian leader is not a babe in the woods. They are not someone who has their head buried in the sand and says, “Oh, everyone is nice. Everything is okay. Why, with just a little bit of tinkering, just a little more legislation, if we could just pass that crime bill and that health plan, America will be a safe and healthy place for us to live.”

A Christian leader doesn't say that. Whatever their political persuasion, democrat, republican, independent, whatever their political persuasions, a Christian leader sees the condition of this world clearly because they are aided in seeing by the clear lens of scripture.

Let me read to you from a new version, paraphrased version of the Bible that I have very much enjoyed reading in my own devotional time. It is a paraphrase of the New Testament called *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. Here is how the apostle Paul, a Christian leader, sees the condition of the world:

“Since they [meaning the world] doesn't bother to acknowledge God, God quits bothering them and let's them run loose. And then all hell broke loose

rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious back-stabbing. They made life

hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering and cheating. Look at them. They are mean-spirited, venomous, fork-tongued, God-bashers, bullies, swaggerers, insufferable wind-bags. They keep inventing new ways

to wreck lives. They ditch their parents whenever their parents get in the way of their plans. Stupid, slimy, cruel, cold-blooded—and it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well that they are spitting in God's face and they don't care. Worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best. They hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best."

Like the Emmy's, like the Academy Awards, we hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best. A Christian leader is someone who sees the condition of the world. And not just the world narrowly defined as "people just like me in central Ohio. People just like me in my age group." A Christian leader's world has to be a big world. It has to involve the next generation. Children are part of the leader's world. Children who are in single parent families are part of their world. Children who don't yet know Christ are part of their world. Children who don't come from our loins are part of the world. People who are older than us are part of the condition of the world—lonely elderly people. People with Alzheimer's and people who are disabled are part of their world.

The world that the Christian leader sees is not only multi-generational, but it is multi-cultural. It is not just folks like me in central Ohio. As we look out at the condition of the world and we see that, we see that much of the world has not been exposed to Jesus Christ. A Christian leader is a world Christian. They see. They see that all of our resources and all of our finances and all of our best people can't just stay here at the Vineyard in Columbus. Because Romans 1 applies to folks in India and folks in Peru and folks in Africa and folks in Russia.

A Christian leader is someone who sees the condition of the world as hurt, as lost, as hell-bound, as unhappy. And a Christian leader is someone who sees the power of the gospel. Verse 6:

"Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand which he had taken with the 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 sins atoned for.'"

Yes, I see my sin. Yes I see the sin in the world. But I see something else. I see the altar of God and those coals that are under the altar, they are a type of the sacrifice that would be ultimately laid on the altar – Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.

A Christian leader is not just wallowing in pessimism saying, "Oh, woe is me. I live in this terrible world – the crime, the teen pregnancies, and the drug abuse. Everyone is hopeless and helpless." No. That is not the extent of the Christian leader's vision. I am not in any way naïve about how horrible the problems are, how massive the crime problem is, how difficult it is to raise kids today, but I see something else. The power of the gospel. The sacrifice laid on the altar. The power that is in the blood in the sacrifice.

We would speak, today, in New Testament terms of the power of the gospel. The apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes."

As a Christian leader looks at themselves and sees their own sinfulness, they don't just sink into despair and say, "I am irredeemably trapped in my present position" They turn away from their sinfulness and they look at the cross, they look at the one who was nailed to the cross, they look to the power that was in that person's life, Jesus' life, and the power that is in his blood poured out in death and they say, "I can change. I can be forgiven. My sins that I have had pointed out to me can be atoned for." The reason I am able to run toward the light, toward embarrassment, toward humiliation, toward confrontation is because I have heard and received Paul's counsel to a Christian named Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1, "Be strong in grace." I know I can be forgiven. I am powerful in grace.

Is that where you are at? Are you strong in grace? Strong in your laying hold of the power of redemption, do you see it?

When you look out at the world, do you say, "Ah...this is terrible, period. What can I do? What can anyone do?" Or do you say, "This person is in terrible shape, but if the gospel came to this person, everything would change." or, "This marriage or my family life is in terrible shape but if we really began building our marriage or our family on Christ, everything would change. If the gospel came to our politicians, boy, what would happen? If the gospel came to my kids' teachers, to their principal, to my neighbor, to my parents—oh, there's power for change in the gospel. If this person I know only knew Jesus, they could have their sins forgiven. They would be different." Do you think that way? Do you pray that way? Do you live that way?

A Christian leader is someone who has a tremendous sense of optimism. Not because they are blind. Because they are in denial. But because they see the power of the gospel – the power of grace. They know somebody strong is rescuing people to this very moment. Somebody strong and good keeps throwing a life-line out to the world. Somebody strong and good and powerful has not given up on any of you or anyone you know. And I'm convinced that somehow if I can just connect you or somebody you know with my good, powerful, saving God, boy, we are in a whole new ball game.

The Christian leader sees the power of redemption. "I can change," they say. You can change. Nothing is written in stone. My marriage is not fixed. My relationships with people are not fixed. We can change because of what went on at the cross.

And, then, here is the last thing that is often preached as if it wasn't the first thing in the vision of a Christian leader. A Christian leader is someone who sees their potential for God. This is not where it starts, in terms of getting or catching a vision. This is where it ends. A Christian leader sees their potential for God.

After Isaiah's sin is atoned for, it says in verse 8:

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send and who will go for us?'"

In my view, this is a wonderful hint of that plurality and unity that we believe in as Christians, that is the Trinity. “Whom shall I send.” God’s unity. “Who will go for us?” God’s plurality. The Lord is speaking as a plurality of persons – as a Trinity.

And Isaiah, seeing his potential usefulness for God, says, “Here am I, send me.”

A Christian leader is not someone who says, “I am so bad that I can’t be used” or “The world is such an overwhelming place that it doesn’t make any sense for us to try to change things.” A Christian leader says, “I can be used. I can be useful to King Jesus. I see these needs in this child’s life. I see what’s going on in my neighborhood. I see that unmarried pregnant woman. I see unevangelized people in Central America. I see the need in this church for more leadership. And with God’s help and by God’s grace I see my potential. I need to be developed. I need to be trained. I need to mature. I need to learn how to walk with God.” But a Christian leader is someone who says, “I believe I have potential. I believe I can be useful. Send me.” That’s the attitude of folks signing up for our school of church leadership and church planting. I believe I have potential.

You see, you can’t be a Christian leader, ever, while you continue to set limits on what God can do through you. So long as you continue to say, “There’s no way that God can use me to really impact the world around me. I can’t be a Christian leader.” A Christian leader hears the call, “Get off the bench. Get in the game.” Stop just getting by. Stop aiming so low. Stop just treading water. Stop aiming at survival. Give your life away. You have sat on the shelf long enough. It is time for this pot to move from the back burner to the front burner. Stop looking at your past with all your vain regrets.

“I know I have a million problems,” the Christian leaders says, “I know the world is an overwhelming place, but I have the potential to impact somebody’s life outside of my home and I am going to do that. I have the potential to develop another human being and to challenge them to do what God wants them to do and I am going to do that. I have the potential to rescue someone from an eternity in hell and I am going to do that.”

A Christian leader says, “I want the world to be significantly worse off when I am gone, when I die.” I want there to be a hole.

With all that I see, I see you, God. I see your holiness. I see that you are always right. I see how your words are clean and pure. I also see my own sinfulness and my own brokenness. And I see how crooked my motives are and I see the overwhelming condition of the world. With all that I see, I see that I have a place in your plan. And that I, even I, can be useful.

A Christian leader believes that they have potential in God. They have a vision for their own lives in the Lord. And so they say to God, “Here am I. Send me, empower me, and use me in this moment.” I see it. I see it. Send me!

Let’s pray.