

## The Holiness of God

### Isaiah 6:1-13

Sunday, April 11th, 2021

*Aside from the Bible, what is your favorite book? Would it be Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities?" "Catcher in the Rye" by JD Salinger, or maybe it's "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee? Maybe the "Harry Potter" series is among your favorites?*

*Or, in the realm of Christian books, perhaps your second favorite book is "The Hobbit" or the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy by JRR Tolkien, or "The Chronicles of Narnia" by CS Lewis?*

When I was young, I really enjoyed reading books. Just about anything written by P.D. Eastman - "Sam and the Firefly," "Are You My Mother?" and "Go, Dog, Go" among them. I wore those books out!

Of course, Dr Seuss was another favorite author - I was especially fond of "The Cat in the Hat," "Green Eggs and Ham," "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish," "Hop on Pop," "10 Apples Up on Top" (my favorite Seuss book), and "I Wish that I had Duck Feet." Classics!

I read "Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel" written by Virginia Lee Burton almost every day.

As a church officer and pastor, there are two books that clearly stand out in terms of interest and importance. One of them is "Knowing God" by J.I. Packer. If you're new to the Christian faith you will find that book very helpful. You can borrow my copy if you'd like to read it, or I'll buy one for you. But, even more important in the formation of my ministry, the book that stands out is "The Holiness of God" by the late Dr R.C. Sproul. It more than any book, helped me understand the essence of the Reformed interpretation of sacred Scripture - that God is sovereign, and we humans are sinful beyond hope apart from God doing something about our plight.

*Have you noticed all the initials these authors go by? PD, JRR, CS, RC, and JI. Maybe I should change my name to D.S. Dietmeier? You could call me Pastor D.S.*

And, that takes us to the text of Old Testament scripture before us today - **Isaiah 6:1-13**. We're in the midst of a brief survey of some of my favorite Old Testament passages that I've called *These are a Few of My Favorite Texts*. This is sermon #4 in a series of 9 or 10. The first three sermons explored **Exodus Chapter 14** (Israel crossing the Red Sea), **Joshua Chapter 10** (The day the sun didn't set), and last week's study with Elijah (God, really) defeating the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah - *remember which book that takes place?* **I Kings Chapter 18**.

### **Isaiah 6:1-13:**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. **2** Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one cried to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord of hosts; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!”

**4** And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

**5** So I said: “Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” **6** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. **7** And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.”

**8** Also 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.”

**9** And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ **10** “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.”

**11** Then I said, “Lord, how long?” And He answered: “Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, **12** The Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land. **13** But yet a tenth *will be* in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump *remains* when it is cut down. So the holy seed *shall be* its stump.”

Last Sunday - Easter Sunday - was the culmination of what is called “Holy Week.” Holy Week moves from Palm Sunday and Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday (Jesus’ death on the cross), and Easter Sunday. It is timely that we are considering the topic of holiness a week later. The text for last Sunday’s message in **I Kings Chapter 18** introduced the fire of the Lord which came down and licked up all the water Elijah poured over the sacrifice he prepared for the Lord’s arrival. Holiness as we find it described in **Isaiah Chapter 6** is akin to that fire.

**Isaiah Chapter 6** shows us five aspects of God we would do well to understand and apply in our worship of almighty God and our lives as His redeemed children. Those five, which we’ll discuss only briefly, are these:

- 1 - The **Holiness** of God (v. 1-4);
- 2 - The **Judgment** of God (v. 5);
- 3 - The **Grace** of God (v. 6-7);

4 - The **Commission** of God (v. 8-10);

5 - The **Mercy** of God (v. 11-13).

Before we examine those more closely, it is good for us to talk about the first king mentioned in verse 1 - "Uzziah." His reign is covered in **2 Chronicles 26**. Uzziah was one of the best kings Judah had. He became king when he was 16 years old, and he reigned for 52 years! He did what was right in the sight of the Lord; he sought God, and as long as he did so, God made him prosper. Uzziah built up Jerusalem, the Holy City, and he fought the Philistines hard. He strengthened Judah's military (307,500 soldiers). But pride got the best of Uzziah. He took incense into the Temple of the Lord, a task reserved by God only for the priests. Uzziah insisted, even so, and God made leprosy break out on Uzziah's forehead. He was a leper until the day of his death.

It was during Uzziah's 52nd and last year as King of Judah (740 BC) that **Isaiah Chapter 6** took place. The first four verses comprise the **holiness** of God. Note how the second King mentioned in verse 1 is described. He sat on a lofty throne, "high and lifted up." Just the train, or hem of His robe, *filled* the temple! "It filled all the space available because 'the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain this exalted and incomparable King' (**I Kings 8:27**). If only the hem of the robe filled the temple, how big must the throne have been!

Above the throne stood 6-winged seraphim. The term "Seraphim" is only mentioned in two places in the Bible, once in verse 2, and the other in verse 6. Seraphim were angelic beings; their name means "burning, glowing." They were part of a celestial choir that sang God's praises in verse 3, "Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord of hosts; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!" The seraphim who cried out caused the door posts to shake and the house was filled with smoke!

Clearly, the God described here is the Holy One of Israel as Isaiah refers to Him 29 times throughout this Old Testament book.

The second aspect of God is **His judgment**. Look again at verse 5, Isaiah is speaking, "Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

"Woe" is great sorrow or distress. As Isaiah came into God's presence, He was convicted of His great unworthiness to be there. When he says that he is "undone," he means that he was, as a sinful man, destroyed or doomed by God's holiness. Left in this state, Isaiah would suffer under God's judgment because He (God) must punish sin.

But, God doesn't leave His elect to suffer for long. His grace counteracts His judgment. Verses 6 & 7 reveal **God's grace**. "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having

in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. **7** And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."

The name "Isaiah" means, "Salvation of the Lord." And, that salvation is God's gift to His chosen ones. Salvation is at God's initiation. It has to be. Before He brings salvation to us, we are dead in our trespasses and sins. According to the Bible that's how we come into this life. Dead people can't initiate anything! Incredibly, God takes all the steps necessary to deliver us from an eternity of punishment due our sins to Himself and His people,

The seraph took the initiative in cleansing Isaiah using a set of tongs to take a live coal to Isaiah, where the seraph touched Isaiah's mouth with the burning coal. In so doing, the seraph purged Isaiah's sinfulness and atoned for his sins. That precisely how it is in the New Testament, only God the Son Himself, not merely one of the angels, has taken away our sins if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. Jesus prepares His children for life everlasting while we have the privilege of worshipping Him with each other and in spirit and truth.

Having been fit for the Lord's service, we next see **God's commission** in verses 8-10. "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me." And he said, "Yes, go, and say to this people, 'Listen carefully, but do not understand. Watch closely, but learn nothing.' Harden the hearts of these people. Plug their ears and shut their eyes. That way, they will not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts and turn to me for healing."

One of two things will happen when God's Word is faithfully preached, taught, and testified to - it will either harden people preventing them from seeing Christ and their need for a Savior, or it will open the hearts of those who are softened to the gospel. God is telling Isaiah his preaching would harden them.'

In light of God's commission, I think Isaiah may have found this quote from Dr. Seuss helpful, "Life is too short to wake up in the morning with regrets. So, love the people who treat you right, forgive the ones who don't and believe that everything happens for a reason. If you get a chance, take it. If it changes your life, let it. Nobody said it'd be easy, they just promised it would be worth it."

Beginning with verse 11, we now have **God's Mercy** on display. Isaiah asks the Lord, "How long? Meaning how long must I continue to preach to people who aren't interested? God's answer is in verses 11 & 12 - Until and through the time when the land is ruined and the people are taken captive and even what's left gets wiped out

again. As time would tell, In less than 20 years, the northern kingdom's capital, Samaria, fell to the Assyrians. It would be more than 100 years until the southern kingdom was sacked.

In the midst of promised destruction, God preserved a remnant - another of His mercies. That's verse 13 - "But yet a tenth *will be* in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump *remains* when it is cut down. So the holy seed *shall be* its stump."

God always leaves a remnant. Elijah alone was left a prophet of the Lord on Mt Carmel. Joseph was alone after his brothers sold him to slavery, and he spent time in jail. Jeremiah, another of God's great prophets, like Isaiah felt alone.

*Maybe you are alone, or feeling that way?* Sometimes people are alone, even though they may be surrounded by loved ones. We must not let ourselves be trapped by the fiction that says we can have fellowship with one another worshipping behind the screens of mobile devices and TV and computer screens. That will help immensely.

But, with God you are never, ever alone. He has promised to always be with us and to never forsake us. We, as the church, all are part of His remnant, which it seems more and more like the true Church of God will one day be in what's left of America.

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Listen to this quote from Dr Sproul's "The Holiness of God" that ties into the sermon text for next Sunday (**Galatians 5:22-23** - The Fruit of the Spirit): "There is nothing easy about becoming holy. Yet, the Bible does make it easy for us to know what holiness is supposed to look like. The fruit of the Spirit - that is where our focus must be." (Sproul, 260)