

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

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Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-9

Isaiah 6:1—9

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!" He said, "Go."

I'd like to stop here for our meditation today. I've been thinking much about the holiness of God in these last few days as I've been preparing for this Sunday, and I've not been able to get away from this aspect – that God is holy, that He is a holy God. This is the passage that the Lord placed upon my heart and I want to tell you right at the beginning, we're going to process through this passage right up to the ninth verse and that word "go". But as we look at everything, I want you, at the back of your mind, to be thinking: Holiness! Holiness! Holiness!

"In the year that king Uzziah died..."

King Uzziah of Judah had a long and distinguished reign. He's described in 2 Chronicles 26 and in 2 Kings 15 where he is referred to as Azariah. But the fact about Uzziah was that he ascended the throne when he was only 16, and he reigned for over half a century – fifty-two years. And overall, he was a good king. In fact, 2 Kings 15:3 says, "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father Amaziah had done."

2 Chronicles 26:5 says, "He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper."

Other things about Uzziah: he also led Israel in military victories over the Philistines and other neighboring nations. He was a strong king, an energetic builder, planner and a general.

2 Chronicles 26:8 says of Uzziah, "His fame spread as far as the entrance of Egypt for he became exceedingly strong."

However, Uzziah's life ended tragically. 2 Chronicles 26:16 says, "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction for he transgressed against the Lord, his God, by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. And in response, God struck Uzziah with leprosy and he was an isolated leper until his death."

As we read this passage, I think it is important for us to be able to look at Uzziah doing wonderful things, walking in the path that God had hewn for him, at least for most of his life. Then, tragically at the end, it seems like everything got to him – the fact that he had longevity, fifty years as king, the fact that he was well-known – that he disobeyed a standing instruction from God and he paid the penalty for it. How careful we too must be, that as we walk as disciples of God, that we make sure that we never get to the point where we take the things that God has explicitly told us, lightly, or to disobey Him. Uzziah did.

“In the year that king Uzziah died.”

Now think about it – Isaiah was ministering during this time, and suddenly Uzziah is gone, and Isaiah is left disillusioned maybe, discouraged. And yet, at this point we read that God shows him something. What did Isaiah see?

“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne.”

A throne in heaven and it's occupied by God. It seems like God is telling Isaiah, “Uzziah might not be on the throne, but I still am.” Things may be difficult at this time because from the time that Uzziah died, it was a downward trajectory in terms of Israel's spiritual growth. They kept going down and down and down. When all of this was just starting, Isaiah was probably discouraged with all of this, and he sees this vision of God sitting on the throne.

There are a number of times in scripture when we are reminded of the throne of God.

- The prophet Micaiah saw God's throne (1 Kings 22:19)
- Job saw God's throne (Job 26:9)
- David talked about God's throne (Psalm 9:4, 9:7, 11:4)
- The sons of Korah saw God's throne (Psalm 45:6, 47:8)
- Ethan the Ezrahite saw God's throne (Psalm 89:14)
- Jeremiah saw God's throne (Lamentations 5:19)
- Ezekiel saw God's throne (Lamentations 5:19)
- Daniel saw God's throne (Daniel 7:9)
- The apostle John saw God's throne (Revelation 4:1-11)

It's a going point for us to ponder a little and remind ourselves that in the midst of all that is going on in the world today, in the midst of lockdowns and Covid and vaccines and everything else, and the uncertainty of each day, that we should never forget that God is still on the throne. I love a chorus that we used to sing many years ago:

God is still on the throne,
And He will remember His own;
Tho' trials may press us and burdens oppress us,
He will never leave us alone.

God is still on the throne,
He will never forsake His own;
His promise is true, He will not forget you,
God is still on the throne.

Beloved, in the midst of all that is going on in your life, the uncertainties, God still reigns. God is still enthroned above, and He looks out and watches out and over you and me. Uzziah may not have been on the throne, but God was and is.

“He saw the train of God's robe and it covered the entire place.”

Just imagine the train of God's robe over the throne, on the ground, all over the entire place filled with it. The train, as you and I know, was something that kings used to have. The longer the train, the more important they were. The train was what distinguished them from each other at that time, and still is. We hear about the long wedding trains, and it just goes to show how many people like to put a lot of stock in that, to show how important they are with the train that they have. But the train of God overflowed everywhere and filled the temple.

"He saw seraphim with six wings, each one had six wings, with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet and with two he flew."

The seraphim used four of their wings to express their humility and used two of their wings to express their willingness and ability to serve God. I think that's the proper balance!

I love the way Spurgeon put it. He said, "Thus they have four wings for adoration, and two for active energy; four to conceal themselves, and two with which to occupy themselves in service, and we may learn from them that we shall serve God best when we are most deeply reverent and humbled in His presence. Veneration must be in larger proportion than vigor, adoration must exceed activity. As Mary at Jesus' feet was preferred to Martha and her much serving, so must sacred reverence take the first place, and energetic service follow in due course."

Why did the seraphim cover their faces? Because, the bible tells us that nobody could look on the face of God and live. Nobody could look on God's face and so they covered their faces. They covered their feet because feet were an expression of unholiness. That is why there was so much importance put on washing of the feet when people came. So the feet were covered and the face was covered.

When Moses was invited up to Sinai by God and he went up to Sinai, he has this conversation with God. He says, "Show me Your face." God says, "No Moses, I can't do that. but I'll do something for you. I'll hide you in the cleft of a rock and I will pass by, and you can just see My back for a fleeting moment." That was what Moses saw of God. But if you remember, when he came down, the people were anxiously waiting for him, wondering whether he was going to come back or not. When they saw him coming down, they ran towards him. But when they came close to him, they had to hide their faces and plead with Moses to go back, because of the radiance that was on his face, just by being in the presence of God as God's back momentarily passed by.

"The holiness, the glory of God filled the temple." That's what Isaiah saw. And what did he hear?

"And one cried to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.'"

Can you picture that? Seraphim singing antiphonally, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is filled with His glory." This continues on antiphonally by various groups of seraphim all the time in the presence of God. God's holiness is sung about continuously. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty." Why three times? Why not just holy is the Lord Almighty? It was known in the Hebrew language, that intensity was communicated by repetition. So if the writer wanted to get the attention or to say something very emphatically, just as we would put something in quotes, or underline it or put it in bold text, they would repeat it and say it once or twice for emphasis. But they used the superlative when it came to saying it three times, and it was used for God. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with His glory."

"The doorposts were shaken, the thresholds trembled and smoke filled the temple."

What a visual that God gave to Isaiah! And how did Isaiah respond?

"Woe unto me," he said, "for I am undone!"

I like what Spurgeon says about that word 'undone' because that word keeps getting translated differently in the bible. But Spurgeon says, "God will never do anything with us till He has first of all undone us." The potter needs to remake the clay into a fitting vessel so that he can then use us.

"Woe unto 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."

There is so much said about lips in the bible – that it can be the seat of so much of wrong-doing and sin and I want to show this to you in terms of nature.

- By nature, our lips are full of flattery and false intent. *"With flattering lips and a double heart they speak."* (Psalm 12:2)
- By nature, our lips lie and are proud. *"Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous."* (Psalm 31:18)
- Our lips deceive. *"Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit."* (Psalm 34:13)
- Our lips are violent. *"Swords are in their lips."* (Psalm 59:7)
- Our lips bring death to others. *"The poison of asps is under their lips."* (Psalm 140:3)

Woe unto me for I am a man of unclean lips. God's response?

"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, and he touched my mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged.' 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.'"

Woe unto me for I am a man of unclean lips. Then the seraphim goes. The coal is so hot that he needs tongs to take it from the fire, and that coal is placed on Isaiah's lips. R.C. Sproul says, "Just from that we can see that God never undermines or just overlooks our sin. He deals with it as it needs to be dealt with." Doesn't in any way minimize it. And yet, it seems like the pain of the coal on Isaiah's lips wasn't anything compared to watching the glory of God – that even after that, he was able to say, as he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?" he responds saying, "Here am I. Send me."

Beloved, that was the commissioning of Isaiah. But like I said earlier on, I want us to just focus on the holiness of God. Why? Because 1 Peter 1:15-17 says, "But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the scriptures say you must be holy as I am holy." But now, you and I, we must be holy in everything that we do just as God who chose you and me is holy. He wants us to be holy as well, to pursue the character of holiness that is so essential, integral to who He is. Holiness is our call as well, to be holy in everything that we do, in our relationships, in our work, as we interact with people, in our behavior, in the words as we speak, in the thoughts we have. God's call for you and me as His chosen people is to be holy.

Quite a few times you have heard me refer to the Shunamite woman who told her husband about Elisha, "I perceive that this is a holy man of God." And that must be how people refer to us, God's disciples, ones who bear His name on our sleeves, that we are a holy people, we are a set-apart people, that the world can look at us and say that we are in the world but we are not of the world. They are different; they are set apart people following a path of holiness.

I loved the fact as I read about Moses wanting to see the face of God, and I thought, "My goodness! What a man! He had seen everything. He had seen the burning bush, he's seen the plagues that God had sent, he had seen the parting of the sea, he'd seen the way God had fed the people, he'd seen water come from a rock. He'd seen it all. And yet, the one thing that he wanted was to get more and

more of God. "Without your presence, we are not going." We looked at that a couple of weeks ago. And now he says, "Show me Your face. I want to see You."

Beloved, can we have that kind of a burning desire to draw closer and closer and closer to God, till we like Moses say: Lord, show us Your glory. We want to see more, experience more of You, because we know that when we are in close proximity with You, that Your holiness will then begin to be a motivation for our own holiness, that we want to be like you. He said, "Be ye holy for I am holy." Holiness is the thing that must set us apart from everyone else, that can reflect the glory of God, the doxa of God on you and me. The original glory that was upon humanity which we lost because of sin, can we pursue it? That as God's glory covers us, that people would just be in awe of the holiness of God that is visible in your life and mine. May that be a pursuit I pray for you and me this morning.

Shall we pray?

Almighty God, we confess that we have been satisfied with just following after You, doing little things. And yet, we are inspired Lord, by men and women that we read about in Your word who sought after You, went after You, sought to be like You. Forgive us that we have settled in our pursuit of You. Inspire us today through Your Holy Spirit, that we may be ones who will trust You, obey You and try to emulate You in every way, for we ask this in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.