

A Call To Holiness

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[0:00] Well, coming face-to-face with a ceiling pouring water out is one thing. Coming face-to-face with a grizzly bear in the wilderness is kind of another thing. It's kind of a life-changing encounter, don't you think?

I personally have not had that happen, and it's not going to happen as far as I can help it. But being in an accident or having some kind of a medical emergency that brings you within an inch of your life, where you're seeing death squarely in the face, that's a different kind of encounter.

You can walk away from that with a new perspective on life. It's a life-changing event. Or maybe looking into your child's eyes for the first time.

Maybe it's a child you just gave birth to or a child you adopted or it's your grandchild that you're seeing for the first time. You look inside in that child's face and this changes everything.

Life-changing encounters. A life-changing encounter is when you come face-to-face with something and as a result, you're not the same. You've been permanently changed.

[1:13] And this morning, we're going to look at a life-changing encounter between Isaiah and the holy God of the Bible.

As a result of this particular encounter that we read of in Isaiah 6, Isaiah was never the same. He was permanently changed. He was transformed.

In fact, we'll see in the text, he went from despair to delight. So for us this morning, this is what it means.

When you personally encounter the holy one, the God of the Bible, you too will never be the same. And my prayer for us as a church as we enter 2015 is that we would personally encounter the holy one.

And that we would corporately encounter the holy one again and again. And again and again. And as we see him with eyes of faith, he will change us by his grace.

[2:27] We will be transformed from one degree of glory to another. So if you haven't, turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 6.

And I'm going to read Isaiah 6, 1 through 8. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up.

And the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face. And with two he covered his feet.

And with two he flew. And one called and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with his glory.

And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Woe is me! For I am lost.

[3:34] For 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.

Then, one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away. And your sin atoned for. And 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. So this morning what we're going to do is we're going to walk through this life-changing encounter between Isaiah and his holy God.

And as this encounter unfolds, it's going to unfold in kind of four moves. The first is this. God reveals himself as holy, holy, holy. And then the second move is despair.

[4:41] Isaiah despairs. Woe is me. And then the third move, God purifies. God cleanses Isaiah with a burning coal.

Your guilt is taken away. It's good news. And then fourthly, Isaiah moves from despair to delight. Having been cleansed, he says, Here am I.

Send me. I want to serve. When you personally encounter the holy God of the Bible, you'll never be the same.

It's a life-changing encounter. So let's see this played out in Isaiah 6. First move is this. God reveals himself to Isaiah.

This is verses 1-4. And Isaiah begins on a historical note. In the year that King Uzziah died, the year was probably 740 B.C., King Uzziah had become king in Jerusalem when he was just 16 years old.

[5:51] Can you believe that? He reigned for 52 years, and during that reign, Judah experienced tremendous growth, tremendous prosperity, and dominance as a nation with the nations around it.

But with the prosperity, Uzziah grew proud. And he made a grave mistake. In his pride, he tried to do something that God would only allow priests to do.

And that was he tried to offer incense on the altar of incense in God's holy temple. And so when Uzziah tried to do this, Azariah, the high priest, said, No, you cannot come in here.

And then 80 other priests had Azariah's back and said, You cannot come in here. And you know what Uzziah did? He raged. And in his rage, God struck him with leprosy on his forehead.

And as a result, Uzziah, this king, was excluded out of God's presence. He could never come back to the temple while he was a leper.

[6:59] God had struck him. Permanently excluded him. And so Isaiah begins, Isaiah 6, with the news that the leper king is dead.

This unholy king is dead. But there's another king. Holy, living, divine, seated on a throne in heaven who is reigning on high.

He is Adonai, the Lord. And the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne. High and lifted up.

What Isaiah sees is God sitting on His throne in heaven. High and lifted up. Reigning over the whole earth. We read that the train of His robe filled the heavenly temple.

I remember as a boy watching the live broadcast of this wedding ceremony of Prince Charles and Princess Diana. I think it was 1981. I was just two.

[8:11] Just kidding. And I can still see in my mind's eye that amazingly long white train of Princess Diana's wedding dress.

I mean, it stood in sharp contrast to the big red runner and it seemingly filled St. Paul's Cathedral in London. It was majestic.

All eyes were on her. She was bigger than life. The train of God's robe fills the heavenly temple. It's a picture of the fullness of God's presence and it's a picture of His majesty. Isaiah is in the presence of the King of the whole earth.

And in verse 2, Isaiah's gaze shifts and we follow Him as His gaze shifts. His eyes move from the one on the throne to the angels above Him.

[9:13] They're called seraphim. It's plural. Singular is seraph. It literally means flaming one. I mean, they must have been an amazing sight in and of themselves.

Each had six wings. With two, they covered their faces. It's a picture of reverence. Their eyes are not worthy to behold the one sitting before them.

With two wings, they covered their feet. Do you remember in Exodus 3? Moses, hears someone calling him from a burning bush, walks up and God calls out to him.

Do you remember what God says? Take off your shoes. Take off your sandals for you are standing on holy ground. These seraphim are in the holy presence of the Holy One.

The God of the nations. The King of the nations. They cover their faces. They cover their feet in His presence. But it's what they're calling to one another.

[10:20] It's what they're saying to each other that becomes the focal point of the passage. Holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of His glory. Holy, holy, holy. In the presence of God, these six winged angels are calling out, holy, holy, holy.

Holy. We see a very similar thing taking place at the end of our Bibles in Revelation chapter 4, verse 8. The apostle John is given a vision of the heavenly throne room too.

And what does he hear? He hears six winged angels crying out, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The angels in God's presence continually declare that God is holy.

Don't make the mistake that what Isaiah experienced and John experienced are isolated events. Hundreds of miles away from here, there's a big waterfall.

[11:35] Niagara Falls. Just as millions of gallons of water are pouring over Niagara Falls, right now, so too, right now, the words holy, holy, holy are pouring out from the lips of seraphim in the presence of our holy God.

When he went to bed last night, the seraphim were calling out, holy, holy, holy. When he woke up this morning, the seraphim are calling out, holy, holy, holy, holy.

Holy. This afternoon during the Packers game. Holy, holy, holy. Our God is constantly being exalted for His holiness.

God's holiness. So what is it? What is holiness? God's holiness is that which defines all of who He is.

God's holiness defines all His other attributes. It's kind of a summary of His complete existence, of His very nature. His holiness is the crown jewel of His attributes.

[13:04] God's love is a holy love. God's justice is a holy justice. God's wisdom is a holy wisdom. God's holiness is His defining characteristic. It sets Him apart.

It summarizes all of who He is and all of what He does. God is holy. Now that word holy is the only word in your Bible that when describing God, there's no other word repeated three times.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read that God is love, love, love. Or God is just, just, just. Or God is wise, wise, wise. Or God is mighty, mighty, mighty. Is God loving? Oh, yes He is.

Is God just? Oh, wonderfully so. Is God wise beyond our comprehension? Is God mighty? He is omnipotent. But the only word repeated three times to describe God is holy.

Holy, holy, holy. And that repetition is emphatic. God wants us to know Him foremost as holy.

[14:14] And what that word essentially means is to be set apart. To be distinct. God is unique in all that He is.

He is qualitatively different in all that He is. What sets God apart is His moral purity. The sum of His nature. God is truth.

God is just. God is rightness. God is goodness. God is love. God is life. God is love. All these characteristics are summed up by the word holy.

And God's holiness burns white hot. God's holiness is not some kind of cold truth.

God's holiness is a burning reality. God is not simply true. It's overwhelmingly real. Hebrews 12:29 describes God as a consuming fire.

[15:21] He's a consuming fire of moral purity. And here in Isaiah, God has experienced, or Isaiah has experienced God's holiness in a palpable way.

All of Isaiah's senses must have been stretched to the limit. He was completely overwhelmed by being God's holy presence. He was encountering the Holy One, the King of the whole earth.

He saw Him. And He heard the seraphim. But not only did He hear the seraphim, He felt what the seraphim were saying.

Did you notice that? The foundations of the house, the heavenly temple, shook as the angels declared God is holy, holy, holy. Smoke filled the temple.

We see smoke throughout our Bibles. In Exodus 19, when God reveals Himself on Mount Sinai to His people, it's accompanied with smoke.

[16:25] It's a theophany. God's showing Himself. Showing up. Mount Sinai shook as it was wrapped in smoke while God descended on it as a fire.

God is a consuming fire of holiness. And God's holiness can scare people. It can threaten us. Because God's holiness exposes us.

It shows us for who we really are. And that is what we see happening in Isaiah 6-5. God reveals Himself as holy, holy, holy.

And the next development is despair. Isaiah despairs. 6-5. Woe is me, for I am lost.

Woe is me. Now up until this point in Isaiah, that word woe has already been used eight times. [17:26] Woe is me. Every time it was God speaking. Woe to you, wicked. Woe to you, drunkards.

Woe to you who call good evil and evil good. Woe to you who are adding room after room. Who are adding garden after garden.

Woe to you who take themselves as the final kind of law on all things. We're proud.

Woe to you who are adding room after room. Woe to you who are adding room after room. It's worth noting that the very first word that the prophet Isaiah speaks in the book of Isaiah is the word woe. But it's not to others.

It's to Himself. Woe is me. Woe is me. Now let's be honest. In our day, we usually don't use the word woe.

[18:25] Woe is me. I forgot the milk. Woe is me. Woe is me. So when Isaiah says in response to God's overwhelming holiness, Woe is me, for I am lost.

Let me help you understand what he's saying. Oh no. My life is over. I'm done. That's what he's saying.

God's holiness has exposed him for who he is. And he thinks he's ruined. He's profoundly aware that he cannot stand and live in the presence of the Holy One.

He thinks his life is over. And we see why he thinks he's a goner. Woe is me, for I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips.

And I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. At this moment in Isaiah 6, Isaiah is profoundly aware of his own sinfulness.

[19:29] We can say he's having an existential moment. He's despairing. He thinks his life is over.

Did you notice the word unclean? I'm a man of unclean lips and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. God's holiness, his moral purity, exposes moral impurity.

Moral uncleanliness. Sin. Sin. What we see happening here is a man being convinced of his own sinfulness by being in the presence of a holy God.

And this is no accident. God purposefully revealed himself to Isaiah this way. And despite what Isaiah is feeling, God is not seeking to destroy him.

God is actually seeking to purify him. Before the wonder comes the woe. Isaiah must first be convinced of his utter sinfulness in light of God's holiness.

[20:32] And so God allows him to despair. For a little bit. What's the significance of unclean lips?

Well, Jesus' words in Matthew 12 may help us. I read this morning in my devotions too out of Luke 6. Jesus says, Out of the abundance of one's heart, the mouth speaks. Isaiah's pronounced awareness of his own unclean lips and of the unclean lips of his people.

Reveals their unclean hearts. Giving themselves to things that are not God. You get some sense of how they are grieving the Holy One in the earlier chapters.

Wanton materialism. Calling evil good and good evil. Wise in their own eyes. Binge drinking. I love dimly lit bathroats.

Do you know why? Because when I look in the mirror of a dimly lit bathroom, I think I look great. No flaws.

[21:43] But when I have to look at myself in the mirror, with a bright light shining on me, I see things that make me cringe.

Things I don't want to see. I see myself as I truly am. When you encounter the Holy One, the consuming fire of holiness, you will become very aware of who you really are.

Sin. Sin. Sin. Sin. God's holiness is like a bright light of moral purity that makes sinners starkly aware of our own sinfulness.

And it makes us cringe. When you see yourself in light of God's holiness, it's the right response. It's true.

Isaiah, having encountered the Holy One, profoundly aware of his own sinfulness, cries out, woe is me, for I am lost. I am lost.

[22:49] The NIV reads, I am ruined. I'm undone. What Isaiah instinctively knows is that he cannot stand alive in the presence of the Holy One

without being ruined.

He is completely dependent on God's mercy. What God is really doing here is loving Isaiah. He is loving Isaiah by exposing Isaiah's sinfulness. Now you may be thinking, now that does not sound loving to me. I mean, Isaiah is having an eternal crisis.

You think that's loving? God does. God wants good for Isaiah. And the best thing for Isaiah is to share in God's holiness.

To be holy as God is holy. The very thing that is threatening Isaiah is the very thing that God wants for Isaiah. Which means Isaiah must first be confronted by his own sinfulness.

[23:59] Isaiah really was sinful. And he really did need to see himself in light of God's holiness. So that he could be purified.

Before the wonder comes the woe. And the same is true for us. We must first see our sinfulness through the light of God's holiness. Before we experience God's gracious cleansing.

Here's a way to think about conviction. Conviction of sin. Conviction of sin is a fierce kindness of God. He's being kind to you.

He's helping you to see yourself as he sees you. It's a fierce kindness. It's a loving kindness.

Because if you don't think you're dirty, you're not going to think you're going to need to be made clean.

So God in his kindness and in his holiness shows Isaiah and us how dirty we are. And we need, we see our need for cleansing. And more often than not, when God exposes a sinner this way, it's overwhelming.

[25:11] You come to an end to yourself. And that's exactly where God wants you. So God reveals himself as holy, holy, holy. Isaiah despairs.

Woe is me. But God doesn't sit around doing nothing. God's at work. His grace is at work.

Verses 6 and 7. While Isaiah is experiencing internal turmoil, God is graciously at work. Look at verse 6.

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. Well, why did that seraph lie to him? Do you know why?

God sent him. God in his grace sent the angel to Isaiah. The Holy One sent a holy angel with a holy coal to make Isaiah holy.

[26:11] To cleanse him. The old-fashioned word is to consecrate him. To cleanse him so that Isaiah could actually stand in the presence of the Holy One without fear.

This is grace. Unmerited favor. Undeserved. God initiating the cleansing of the sinner. Why is he carrying this coal?

Well, he was sent from God. For that coal to be alive means that it was glowing hot. And for that coal to be coming from the altar in heaven means that it was holy.

So God is sending this coal which is alive and holy with this angel to Isaiah for a reason. God's going to cauterize Isaiah.

Do you know what it means to cauterize something? You burn something to make it clean. It's going to burn away all impurities. He's going to cleanse Isaiah.

[27:20] And so with that live holy coal when it touched Isaiah's lips. You know what Isaiah would have experienced? Searing pain. And internal relief.

Because he had been cleansed by the Holy God. He had been made holy in God's sight. What kind of cleansing is this? Look at verse 7.

Your guilt is taken away. And your sin atoned for. Isaiah's unclean lips symbolize Isaiah's unclean heart. He was really guilty before a holy God.

And God really did cleanse him. And with the touching of this coal to Isaiah's lips, Isaiah was pronounced fully forgiven. Completely cleansed.

His sin had been atoned for. He had been consecrated. Set apart for the Holy One. God made Isaiah holy by His grace.

[28:20] We need to be forgiven like Isaiah needed to be forgiven. We need to be cleansed as Isaiah needed to be cleansed. And God in His grace has made a glorious provision for us.

It's not a coal though. God's provision for our sinfulness is alive and holy Savior.

And we learn about this Savior in the Gospel message. The good news about Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus who lived a holy life.

A life that none of us ever could live. And then Jesus died in the place of sinners. He bore our ruin. And then He was raised from the dead.

All to make sinners holy in God's sight. Jesus is a living and holy Savior. And today, when God touches the heart of a sinner with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and when that Gospel message is met with faith, yes, sinfulness will be exposed.

[29:38] But there will be fullness of forgiveness. Cleansing that comes through Jesus. The making of a sinner holy. God through Christ in His grace makes sinners holy.

Have you been touched? Have you been touched? By the Gospel?

By the living and holy Savior? Have you experienced the internal despair over your own sinfulness? That's God's fierce kindness to you.

He's just exposing your sinfulness so He can purify you. Have you experienced the relief of having been forgiven and cleansed by Jesus? No, you haven't. You know what you do?

You cry out to Jesus. You call out to God to cleanse you through Christ. If you're plagued by past sinfulness, cry out to Jesus.

[30:41] He cleanses you. What you see here happening with this coal being sent in the hands, the tongs of an angel is God's grace.

Undeserved. Unmerited. God didn't wait too long. Yes, He let Isaiah despair so that Isaiah could understand his need to be cleansed.

And then God cleansed him. The last move I want you to see is where all this kind of ends up in verse 8. Isaiah is no longer despairing.

He's delighted. Here am I. Send me. The joy of being made holy. Now this angel has just told Isaiah that his guilt is forgiven and his sin has been cleansed.

And then Isaiah hears God speak. This is Isaiah's commissioning as a prophet. Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? Us.

[31:46] Who's the us? Most likely a veiled reference to the Trinity. Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? God's looking for a volunteer.

Here's the scene. God in His heavenly throne room. Isaiah is there watching. And God's kind of like, who's going to go for us? I wonder. Hmm. Who shall we send?

Isaiah responds. Here am I. Send me. What a change.

Isaiah is no longer despairing. He's no longer thinking, woe is me for I am ruined. Do you know why? He's no longer condemned by his sin. He's no longer despairing under the holy gaze of God. God has completely forgiven him and cleansed him. And God has graciously delivered him from his sin. God made him able to stand in his holy presence by his grace.

[32:50] That's what God has done. That's why Isaiah is saying, here am I. Send me. No fear there. Isaiah has encountered God in his holiness and grace.

And grace. By God's grace, Isaiah is never the same. He's permanently changed.

He has had a life-changing encounter with God and all through the rest of Isaiah, 25 times Isaiah references God as the Holy One.

He was mocked. He no longer fears death. Rather, he wants to live for the Holy One. How about you? Do you want to live for God like Isaiah?

Here am I. Send me. Have you experienced Christ so you know what it means to not fear? At the beginning of the year here, I want to ask you to join with me in something.

[34:03] Will you join me in regularly asking our Holy God to grow us in holiness? To make us holy as he is holy.

To share in his holiness. To purify us. God commands his people everywhere. Be holy for I am holy. So Christ the King Church this year, let's purpose together in prayer and when we're together to strive together for holiness.

To live lives that are set apart. That's why Jesus died for us. Next Sunday, we return to Ephesians. The Holy God of Isaiah 6 is the Holy God of Ephesians.

And just to prime the pump a little bit, Ephesians 1.1 says that Paul, an apostle Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus.

Saints literally means holy ones. To the holy ones in Ephesus. It's who we are in Christ. Holiness is our calling.

[35:13] God shows us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. It's who we are.

It's what he's called us to. And holiness is how we are in Ephesians. Ephesians 4.1 Therefore, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you, holy ones, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, to be holy and blameless before him.

Because that's why Christ died for you. So next week, we're back in Ephesians 5. And we will see what everyday holiness looks like for a Christian.

Let me close by saying this. When you encounter the Holy God of the Bible, you will never be the same. Because by his grace, his amazing grace, he has made you holy in Christ.

Let's pray. Let's pray. God, we come to you before you and recognize that you are the Holy One.

[36:32] And from your throne of holiness flows a river of grace. You've made us alive in Christ so that we can walk in holiness.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.