

AM Isaiah 6:1-13 "I saw the Lord"

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Preacher: Rev John Sharp

[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the Word of God in the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah. I would imagine a fairly well-known passage, Isaiah chapter 6, reading from the beginning.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. 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. And 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, 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.

[1 : 13] 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?

And I said, Here am I, send me. He said, Go and tell this people, Be ever hearing, but never understanding.

Be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people callous, make their ears dull, and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

Then I said, For how long, O Lord? And he answered, Until the city lies ruined and without inhabitant. Until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged.

Until the Lord has sent everyone far away, and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tent remains in the land, it will again be laid waste.

[2 : 27] But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land. Amen, and may God add his blessing to his word.

Let us pray. Our gracious Father, once again we bow before you. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your glory our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. We are probably wearily aware that we live in a troubled world.

Whether it be the problems of climate change, a Covid pandemic, war in the Ukraine, or economic implosion.

We live in a society that is so often increasingly turned in upon itself. The great need of our society today is a vision.

[3 : 35] Not a vision of personal peace and affluence, but a vision of deeper realities. Proverbs 29 and 18, where there is no vision, the people perish.

For any vision to have any value, it must be a vision that includes God. And it seems to me there is a desperate need today for a renewed vision of God, and that that vision needs to begin with Christian folk.

In Isaiah chapters 2 and 4, we find the prophet bringing God's word of judgment concerning Jerusalem. The word of judgment, as he sets out what Jerusalem was meant to be, and contrasts that with what it had become.

And I suppose we could apply that to our land today. It is a message of judgment, but also a word of hope, as the prophet portrays what Jerusalem would be after God's judgment, namely cleansed and renewed.

It is no accident that chapter 6 starts literally, I saw also the Lord. For what Isaiah recounts concerning his personal experience, bears much in common with the nation Israel.

[5 : 09] As Jerusalem was to be judged and cleansed to bring it to its true function, so also was he, the prophet, to be brought under the searching holiness and judgment of the Lord, and cleansed.

As with the nation, so with the prophet. In the year that King Uzziah died, our passage begins. It was a time of crisis and uncertainty.

The reign of Uzziah had generally been one of peace and prosperity, but the peace was a false peace. It was a peace without God, and such peace is always doomed to disintegrate into crisis. Isaiah knew the reality of this social crisis around him. He knew the need for a renewed vision by the people of God.

But God also knew that Isaiah the prophet needed a deeper vision of the divine majesty. And so Isaiah had his vision, which we read of here in Isaiah 6, his encounter with the Lord.

[6 : 24] I saw also the Lord, he says. But we need to beware, if we too, with Isaiah, would see the Lord, seeing the Lord for encouragement and renewal, can be painful and fraught with costly transformation.

Isaiah saw the Lord and found it an overwhelming experience. For what he saw was a holiness of, a vision of the holiness of God, that had very specific implications for himself.

The vision of Isaiah of God was essentially a vision of God's holiness. In verse 3 we find that repetition, holy, holy, holy is the Lord.

A repetition stressing the fact of God's holiness. And the theme of God's holiness could keep us going for a long time. And indeed this little passage is worth spending weeks in studying.

But we must just sketch in the general outline this morning. The holiness of God includes all that sets God apart from us.

[7 : 44] The root meaning of the word holy is essentially separation. God is separate from us. God is not like us. God is the creator.

We are the creature. He is infinite. And we are finite. The holiness of God includes all that sets God apart from us.

It includes all that sets God above us. Isaiah says, I saw the Lord high and lifted up. And the holiness of God should be at the heart of our worship.

God on his eternal throne. God on his eternal throne. As we come before him to worship him. But if the holiness of God includes all that sets God apart from us.

And all that sets God above us. It also includes all that sets God against us. And we come back to the purity of God. And we come back to the purity of God.

[8 : 44] And the sin that taints our lives. The holiness of God casts the darkness of our hearts into sharp relief. And there is a need for solemnity here.

I need to fear God. Not in the sense of terror. But of awe and reverence. God's not some benevolent old man.

He is God. One before whom we fall in worship. God in all his grandeur and majesty. And Isaiah is overwhelmed by awe.

And flattened by shame. As he sees the Lord. Professor James Packer. Commenting on this passage.

Indicates five qualities of God that are evident in the passage before us. And I would like to use these five points that Professor Packer indicates as my structure this morning.

[9 : 50] What are the five qualities of God that we see in this passage? First of all, his lordship. I saw the Lord seated on our throne.

Isaiah immediately aware of God being on our throne. And we might think of Revelations chapter 4 and 5.

And the similar sort of vision of God that John had. As he sees God the Father on his throne. A few years ago there was a popular hymn which was called Our God Reigns.

And that's true. God reigns. At the end of the day he is in charge of his universe. He reigns as creator and as saviour.

Working out his eternal purposes. God's throne points us to a God who rules. And the challenge inherent in that is if God rules.

[11 : 03] Is he truly ruling in our hearts. In every aspect of them. I used this quotation last week. I make no apology for using it again.

From Abraham Kuiper who was a Dutch theologian. Politician and many other things. He said there is not one square inch of human existence.

Over which Christ does not say I am king. Not one square inch of human existence. Over which Christ does not say I am king.

And Kuiper incidentally among the many other things he did. He became Prime Minister of Holland around about 1900. He edited throughout most of his life two papers.

A daily paper and a weekly. When you went to church on a Sunday in Holland you got your weekly paper. And as well as editing that weekly paper.

[12:06] The weekend paper. He wrote the devotional column for it. And these have been gathered together. Into I think there is two or three volumes of them.

Called Pro Reggae. For the King. For the King. It doesn't matter what part of our life. It needs to be brought under the rule.

Of the one who is the Lord. Seated in our throne. The Lordship of God. The greatness of God.

I saw the Lord high. And exalted. Pointing us upwards. To the greatness of God. And here is surely the essence of worship.

The focus upon God. Not Isaiah. Not us. And the essence of each service of worship.

[13:03] As we gather here. Is not what do I get from it. But does God receive the devotion. And the worship. Of our hearts.

Here the reference to his robe filling the temple. Meant to convey something of the majesty. And the immensity. Of his presence. So there is the Lordship of God.

His rule. His greatness. High and exalted. And then his nearness. In verse 3 we read. The whole earth is full of his glory.

In verse 4 we find the phrase. The temple was filled with smoke. Now in the Old Testament. Smoke in this setting was seen as representing. The presence of God.

And to that. Immediate presence. We have the words that his glory. Fills the earth. Death. The glory of God is also something. It speaks. Of the presence of God.

[14:03] To us. And so Isaiah is reminded of the God. Who is the living God. The God who is there. The God from whose presence. It is impossible. To escape.

I think of Jonah. Remember how Jonah thought. He could escape. God's challenge. Upon his life. To discover that. He could not escape. From the presence of God.

Or think of Psalm 139. Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens.

You are there. If I make my bed in the depths. You are there. If I rise in the wings of the dawn. If I settle on the far side of the sea. Even there. Your hand will guide me.

Your right hand will hold me fast. God is ever present. The Lordship of God.

[15:03] The greatness of God. The nearness of the presence of God. And the purity. Fourthly. Of God. And perhaps it is the purity of the Lord.

That overarches this whole incident. In Isaiah 6. God is always right. Always good. Always just. And it is this purity of God.

That is at the heart of his nature. And if we are honest. It is this purity of God. That disturbs us. For we are unable to stand before it.

God. And. As Isaiah. Is overcome by. The sense of God's holiness. And presence.

There is an interesting parallel. With John. In the book of Revelation. At the beginning of Revelation. Chapter 1. Verse 17. When I saw him.

[16:04] I fell at his feet. As though dead. And then he placed his right hand on me. And said. Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one.

I was dead. And now look. I am alive. Forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death. And Hades. But John's first. Reaction in seeing. That the risen.

Exalted Christ. Was to fall at his feet. As though dead. Or think of that little incident. That we read of. In the gospel of Luke. Chapter 5.

And verse 8. Where we read. When Simon Peter saw this. He fell at Jesus knees. And said. Go away from me Lord. I am a sinful man.

For he and all his companions. Were astonished at the catch of fish. They had taken. So as Peter. You remember Jesus. Tells them to cast their nets. And to get this great catch of fish.

[17:02] And Peter has a sense. Of. The divinity of Jesus. And he says. Go away. Go away. I am a sinful man.

The lordship. Of God. The greatness of God. The nearness of God. God. And the purity. Of God. And these are all there.

In this encounter. Of Isaiah. But if Isaiah sees. The lordship. And the greatness. And the nearness. And the purity of God.

Then he realises. That there are consequences. For him. And any real vision. Of God. Must lead to results. Our reflection.

On this vision. Should not be theoretical. Should lead somewhere. Can't see God. And remain as we are. Can't see God. And remain unaffected.

[18:02] Look at the consequences. Here for Isaiah. Isaiah. And they are. I would suggest. A pattern. Of what should be the outflow. In our lives. If we indeed. Open our eyes.

And see the lord. The experience of Isaiah. Should be our experience. And first of all. We find conviction. Confronted by the purity of God.

Isaiah was immediately convicted. Of his sin. Not. Sin. As some. Abstract. Concept. But specifically. Verse 5.

Woe to 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. And there are two elements here. The sin. Of the nation. I live. Among a people. Of unclean lips.

[19:04] A nation. Riddled. By sins. Of the tongue. And in all probability. Isaiah. Was particularly. Conscious. Of the nominal.

Cold. Formality. Of religion. Around him. People. Said the right words. In prayers. And praise. But their hearts.

Were far from broken. Consecration. Before the lord. God. A people. Of unclean lips. But Isaiah. Also says.

I am a man. Of unclean lips. There was his own tongue. Here was Isaiah. Called. Of God.

To be his prophet. To proclaim the word of God. And yet. Isaiah. Is conscious. That they're tripped. From his lips. That which was dishonouring. To God. And perhaps.

[20:01] That speaks to us. It's actually fascinating. How. Time and time again. In scripture. When sin is mentioned. It is related.

To the sins. Of the tongue. How often. Are God's people. Guilty of harsh. Judgments. In others. How often.

Guilty of gossip. How often. Are others. Discouraged. Or bruised. By ill considered. And thoughtless. Comments. Here was Isaiah's sin.

Perhaps it is ours. Also. Isaiah. Was convicted. Of his sin. Specifically. And that.

Led. To confession. And verse 5. Is really. Confession. Born out. Of inner conviction. Within Isaiah. And conviction.

[20:59] Without confession. Is sterile. And destructive. If we are convicted. Of sin. Then. The next step. Is that.

Of confession. In 1st John 1 and 9. We read. If we confess. Our sins. He is faithful. And just. And will forgive us.

Our sins. And purify us. From all unrighteousness. If we. If. We confess. Our sins. And that leads us.

To the third. Consequence. For Isaiah. Conviction. And confession. Led. To cleansing. For Isaiah. Verse 6 and 7. Then one of the seraphs. Flew to me. With a life 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.

[21:53] Your guilt. Is taken away. And your sin atoned for. Back in. First John again. Verses 1. Sorry.

First John chapter 1. Verse 8. If we claim. To be without sin. We deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins.

He is faithful and just. And will forgive us our sins. And purify us. From all. Unrighteousness. And that all flows.

From the vision of God. A glorious transforming. Experience. Of cleansing. Came to Isaiah. And that's the good news.

God cleanses us. Renews us. Forgives us. And calls us to himself. But. There was one more consequence.

[22 : 50] Isaiah's. Vision is not. Just for personal. Renewal. Personal. Forgiveness. And cleansing. Confession.

And. Conviction. And confession. And cleansing. Lead to commission. Verse 8. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying. Whom shall I send.

And who will go for us. And I said. Here am I. Send me. God does not want.

Spectators. As it were in his church. But servants. And witnesses. And envoys. There are no hymn. That goes. As follows.

Lord. Speak to me. That I may speak. In living echoes of thy tone. O lead me Lord. That I may lead. The wandering.

[23 : 47] And the wavering feet. O teach me Lord. That I may teach. The precious things. Thou dost impart. Now we do notice.

The consequence involved. In these words. Lord speak to me. Fine. Lord lead me. Fine. Lord teach me.

Fine. But the hymn writer. Notes. That all of these. Involve. A consequence. Of commission. Lord speak to me. That I may speak.

To someone else. Lord lead me. That I may lead. Someone else. Teach me. That I may teach. The word that.

Implies commission. And God calls each of us. To service. He wanted a. Renewed Isaiah. To go out into the world.

[24 : 46] With his word. And so today. God wants his people. To have a clearer vision. Of him. As he truly is. And thus. Convicted and confessing.

To enter into that experience. Of cleansing. And commission. Now earlier. I indicated. Professor Packer. Spoke of five qualities.

Of God's holiness. That are evident. In this passage. And if you've been following. Carefully. You'll realize. I've missed one. So far. But I want to bring it in.

As we draw to a conclusion. I've mentioned four. The lordship of God. The greatness of God. The nearness of God. And the purity of God. The last quality of God.

We find in this passage. Is his mercy. Isaiah's vision of God's holiness. Includes a new awareness.

[25 : 42] Of the mercy of God. In this encounter. Isaiah found himself. Refined. And cleansed. By a merciful God.

Verses six and seven again. One of the seraphs flew to me. With a live coal in his hand. And with it he touched my mouth. And said. See this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away.

And your sin atoned for. Your guilt is taken away. And your sin atoned for. And that is.

Reflective. Of the mercy of God. And so it was. Because of the mercy of God. And the cleansing of God. That Isaiah's.

Woe to me. For I am a man of unclean lips. Is transformed. Into his. Here am I. Send me.

[26 : 41] And so with us. For this too is the God. With whom we have to do. He doesn't change. He is still the one who is Lord. The one who is great.

And near. And pure. And still the one who is merciful. And he comes to us. Through the cross. Of Christ. And offers to us.

Today. Renewal. And forgiveness. And cleansing. But also commission. To go out into the world. And to be his people.

May each of us. Be given the grace. As Isaiah was. To see the Lord. And to come to Christ.

Receiving. All the blessings. Of the gospel. Let us pray. Let us pray.