

# Jesus on the Throne

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, please turn in your Bibles back to Isaiah 6 and have that open in front of you. And while maybe you're finding the page, let me ask you a question.

What do you think is the biggest issue in the world today? If you look at the newspapers or listen to the radio or look online, there are plenty of answers that might come up.

Perhaps it is Brexit. That is the biggest issue. Or perhaps it is who our next Prime Minister will be. Perhaps it is whatever President Trump will do next. Perhaps it's the situation in the Middle East with Iran.

Well, the Bible is no stranger to questions of international crisis and leadership. Not least of all in Isaiah's day, when they were facing a massive problem.

From the point of view of the people, things have been going pretty well. King Uzziah has led them into great prosperity. Business is booming. The region is stable.

[ 1 : 12 ] There's been peace with the Northern Kingdom going on for a few decades at this point. They've conquered enemies. The kingdom has grown. Life looked great.

It's almost as if they had another Solomon or David on the throne. Things were that good. But then things seem to take a turn for the worse. There is an invasion threat from the Assyrians, who are a brutally powerful nation.

If they conquered you, they would drag you away into slavery. And then with that threat on the horizon, we're told in the first verse that this is when King Uzziah died.

To put that into perspective, imagine if in 1940, the nation woke up to the news that Winston Churchill had just passed away. Fear would have gripped the land.

Things would have seemed very dark for Judah. Would they be able to win against their enemies? Who would lead them as well as Uzziah had? But actually, things are much worse than they seem because they have a much bigger issue.

[ 2 : 29 ] They are not right with God. When you read Uzziah and you go through the first five chapters of the book to get to the chapter we're looking at this morning, he describes a general overview of the state of the country during his lifetime.

And it is terrible. Judah is full of lying. It's full of false religion. It's full of exploiting the poor and arrogance. And Uzziah has said that the Lord has promised them judgment.

And at the same time, though, there are also statements which say that God has a beautiful future planned as well. Now, the rest of Uzziah, as you know, unpacks those things.

It says both the judgment and the beautiful future which is ahead of them. But here, at this point, we get the description of his calling. How he became a prophet in the first place.

And although this is Uzziah's calling, this passage, like the whole of Uzziah, is all about God and what he is doing.

[ 3 : 39 ] So it means that when we read it, rather than looking for a vision similar to Uzziah, or maybe complaining that we don't feel such a powerful call on our lives as Uzziah did, we can celebrate what God is like.

God doesn't change. He is the same now as when this happened in 740 BC. We are not Uzziah, but we have Uzziah's God.

So, as we see Uzziah called, we'll see three things about God. First, we'll learn of God's holiness. Then, we'll see God's cleansing.

And last of all, we'll hear God's message. So, God's holiness, God's cleansing, God's message. So, we start with God's holiness.

We have before us in the book this awesome vision that Uzziah has, which declares just how holy God is.

[ 4 : 45 ] It's in verses 1 to 4. God is high and lifted up. His train, coming from his robe, fills the temple. These six-winged angels called the seraphim, which literally means fiery ones, are around his throne and they call out that God is holy.

What we're getting from Uzziah is a sneak peek into something we don't normally get to see. The Bible doesn't talk about spiritual versus unspiritual.

Everything is spiritual in the Bible's eyes. But we do have things which are seen and we have things which are usually unseen. And the throne room of God is definitely one of those things which, in this life at least, is normally unseen.

So, human language struggles to cope with describing his full majesty and glory. So, we don't get any description of what the Lord looks like, but we do get important details which give us an indication of what he is like.

So, let's look at those details now. First of all, he's on a throne, ready to judge. The Lord reigns as king of heaven and earth.

[ 6 : 08 ] He is the one in charge. Nothing on earth can happen without his permission. People might be looking to the empty throne of King Uzziah for their future, but they seem to have forgotten that the throne of heaven is never empty.

However good their earthly rulers were, they always operated under the sovereignty of the Lord. Blessings and cursings for the people came from him, and they owed their first allegiance to him above all else.

The Lord's train, it's a little bit like a long cloak, fills the temple. God fills all of heaven with his majesty.

He is attended to by these powerful six-winged seraphim. But he's so glorious that even the seraphim can't bear to look directly at the Lord.

They use two of their wings to cover their faces and another two to cover their feet in modesty.

Even unfallen, sinless angels humble themselves in the presence of the Lord God.

[ 7 : 29 ] But if they can't look directly at him, instead they cry out excitedly to each other the wonderful message that God is holy, holy, holy.

Three times the word is used about God. Each repetition is increasing the intensity of what is being said. The Lord is totally holy.

The only person the three-fold repetition is used about in this way in all of Scripture. Now for some, sadly, holiness has a negative connotation.

As though, if you're holy, it just means that you're a killjoy who doesn't want people to have good things or to enjoy themselves. But holy, holy is not a holier-than-thou attitude.

Look down my nose at you. It's not prudishness or arrogance. God is holy. He is spiritually pure and completely removed from all sin, all moral filth, all muck.

[ 8 : 40 ] and this is a wonderful thing, my friends. He is always just. He is always righteous.

He is always loving. That's why the angels sing these words of praise and worship. He deserves them.

He's the only one who does. And the angels go on to sing that the whole earth is full of his glory.

The Lord's reign does not stop at the border of Judah or of Israel. The whole earth belongs to him. It was made by him and it was made for him.

He occupies it. Nowhere on earth can you go and not be in the presence of God. All the Lord's creation testifies to his glory.

[ 9 : 41 ] This weekend is my first visit to Lewis. And so yesterday I thought I'd see as much of it as I could. I went up to see the standing stones at Karanish and you stand up there on the hill and you see the locks and the drowned valleys as they call them.

And then I went up to the butt of Lewis where the rocks thrust out of the grass before you even get to the cliff edge and then the waves are smacking into them in the Atlantic Ocean.

And it's beautiful and breathtaking. And I hope you haven't lived here so long that you've gotten used to how beautiful and breathtaking this place is.

But even that even the beautiful view that we see this morning when we step out of the church it's only declaring a tiny tiny part of the stupendous glory of our Lord.

Well finally the doorposts were shaken by the angelic cries and the place was filled with smoke. this is a sign of God's presence which you might remember from Exodus where the pillar of smoke leads the Israelites to freedom or even at the transfiguration of Jesus.

[ 11 : 07 ] Remember when he goes up the mountain and two of his disciples get a glimpse of his divinity and the cloud descends around them and he shines. God appears in front of Isaiah and even before he speaks his mere presence just his presence is enough to rock the foundations of Isaiah's world.

Now let me ask you this today is this the God who you worship? Do you know him as holy? Do you know him as glorious?

Do you know him as reigning? I say again we are not Isaiah but we have Isaiah's God.

This is not an image that we can somehow leave behind in the Old Testament and not be concerned with as Christians as if this is somehow an outdated view of God and Jesus has replaced it.

No, we are given a very similar image in the book of Revelation where it describes again the throne of heaven. We serve an awesome God who is perfect in every way and the gospel of John is explicit.

[ 12 : 42 ] The person on the throne that Isaiah saw is Jesus. He is the Lord who reigns.

So we need to remember this fact whenever we read the gospels. It is this God from the throne who is walking around in Galilee and Jerusalem in the flesh.

When the demons screamed in terror it was because they saw this Lord coming towards them.

When we pray in Jesus name we are praying in the name of this king who is on the throne.

This is the holy God who Isaiah sees. God is God holiness then in the next section verses five to seven we see God's cleansing power able to take away guilt and atone for sin.

Isaiah sees the awesomeness and is terrified in verse five we hear him cry out woe is me for I am lost.

[ 13 : 59 ] He is calling down a curse on himself because of this great vision he is as good as dead but it's not simply the sheer size or the power of God which scares him instead Isaiah says it is because I am a man of unclean lips it is God's holiness which terrifies him he should be able to join the song of the seraphs and celebrate the holiness of God that is what he wishes he could do but he knows how completely unfit he is to do so because he is stained by sin from his mouth the words would be completely hypocritical celebrating something which his life has not lived up to but then

Isaiah shows that his situation is even worse because he lives among a people of unclean lips not only Isaiah but the entire nation is sinful no one is living by God's command or worshipping him as they should for them to even see the king to see the lord almighty means their end is near a sinful person next to holy god it's like tissue paper next to a bonfire nothing they can do will fix this Isaiah seems doomed now it's very easy for us to read the old testament and to judge Israel as being spiritually blind and foolish as they sin against the lord because they are but are we any better than Isaiah aren't we just as sinful without some intervention we could not be in the presence of God either by ourselves the holiness ought to terrify us just as it does Isaiah we would be just as lost just as vulnerable sometimes you hear someone say they are looking for God they earnestly want to see him they say they are on a spiritual journey and I think they are being honest in their intention sometimes of saying they want to seek out God but the reality is if they saw God while still in their sins it would be the most frightening and terrible day of their lives but but glory glory to

God we see in this passage heaven takes the initiative God acts to save a seraph takes a burning coal from the altar touches it to Isaiah's lips and declares that he is no longer guilty his sin has been atoned for it has been paid for he is now fit to be a prophet of God and declare the Lord's holiness the imagery of fire is used throughout the Bible for God's judgment and purification and it certainly plays a role here in the cleansing of Isaiah with the burning coal but we're still left with the question how can this atone for sin what payment has been made the fact that the coal is taken from an altar hints that a sacrifice has been made but nothing is described as dying here there doesn't seem to be the required sacrifice now here we have the advantage over

Isaiah because praise God we know from history that a sacrifice has been made here we see God's love for his people far from just staying on the throne and only judging sin from a distance God decides to rescue sinners he came in the flesh as Jesus and paid for our sins on the cross or as Philippians chapter 2 puts it Christ Jesus who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross the

[ 19 : 38 ] God whose holiness and majesty shakes creation itself is the same God who steps down from the throne to come in the flesh to pay for the sins of the world what we couldn't do God does the righteous one for the unrighteous the sinless one for the sinful God saved sinners so that we can celebrate with the seraphim now let me ask you again is this the God that you know do you trust in what he has done for you when people ask you what Christianity is about do you tell them of the amazing work of Jesus who came from heaven to die in the place of sinners or do you say that you've been to church every

Sunday and you've tried to be good there is no comparison between those two answers is there this is God's amazing grace as he cleanses Isaiah so we've learned of God's holiness we've seen God cleansing Isaiah so that he can be his prophet now we hear God's message that he wants Isaiah to deliver now that Isaiah is cleansed of sin he can be in the presence of God and instead of being terrified he hears God's voice he's able to hear the discussion of the heavenly courts more than that he's willing to respond verse 8 whom shall I send and who will go for us and I said here am I send me

God's grace in cleansing Isaiah spurs him on to serve enthusiastically only a forgiven man only one who knows his own sinfulness and confidently knows that he has been cleansed can offer this message because God's message here is one of judgment it's not just a warning of destruction but a judgment of a particular kind verse 9 but keep on hearing but do not understand keep on seeing but do not perceive make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy and blind their eyes lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed the same message that warns the people of

Judah will be the one which caused them to reject it and turn away from God even more there will be no mega church ministry for Isaiah he will spend decades preaching but not being listened to so in verse 11 he calls out in a lament how long oh lord partly for himself but also asking how long will this judgment last against God's people but God says that Judah won't listen until after they go into exile until cities lie waste without inhabitants and houses without people and the land is a desolate waste and the lord removes people far away and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land but there still is a hope we see that at the very end of this chapter in verse 13 a holy seed will be kept there will be pruning the ground will be cleared it will even be burnt but new growth will occur a remnant of people from the

Jews will be protected and their line will eventually lead to Jesus coming and rescuing them from their sins this pattern of Isaiah's ministry is not unusual verse 9 is quoted by Jesus about his own ministry not everybody listened to him but instead some rejected his message and opposed him ultimately they executed him when Paul is spreading the gospel in Acts he again quotes this verse and explains that not everyone will receive the gospel and we need to remember this fact today the gospel is divisive divisive many people will believe and we should go out with confidence and trust that as we spread the gospel we will see people get converted but the truth is that at the same time as that others will oppose it that's why

[ 25 : 25 ] Christianity and Christians will never be liked by everyone and the history of the church shows that now we can of course we can upset people for the wrong reasons we are called to be as welcoming and as loving as possible even loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us but we must realize that spreading the gospel will mean rejection from some people who reject the rule of the king will also reject the servants of the king and the message that they bring but as Jesus taught his disciples if the world hates us bear in mind that it hated him first now before I finish let's go back to that original question that I asked you what is the biggest issue today well whatever the newspapers say or

TV or websites when we know we are not that different from people from 3000 years ago the biggest issue of our time is still that people are not right with God in our chapter this afternoon we see the way in which Isaiah was called the way that God chose to act towards a particular individual in history to prepare him for his ministry but we also see what God is like yesterday today and forever God is holy beyond compare yet he chooses to cleanse and rescue sinners and use them to spread his message the good news of the gospel is ours to share and our world needs to hear it not all will receive the message some will reject it others might ignore it but the Lord has given his message to us his people and we must respond faithfully to the call let us pray thank you