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Date: 12 June 2022

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Good morning. We come today to Trinity Sunday and to Isaiah chapter 6 verse 1 to 7 this morning.

! I've been going through the upper room discourses in John chapter 13 to 17 in the past four weeks. And if you've been paying attention, you can't help but see the Trinitarian framework of Jesus' words in those chapters.

He speaks of himself as the Son from the Father, and he speaks of the Holy Spirit that will come from the Father and the Son to us.

And he speaks of the triune God as in unity in the work of our salvation. This morning, we will be looking at the great vision of the prophet Isaiah as he's taken to the heavenly throne of God, as he beheld God's glory.

So I invite you to turn with me to Isaiah chapter 6. It's on page 678 of your Pew Bible. Isaiah begins, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.

[1:28] I saw the Lord. I saw the Lord. I saw the Lord, the Sovereign One. Adonai. sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.

And the train of his robe filled the temple. In the year that King Uzziah died. You know, the death of a monarch is a distressing thing in the life of a kingdom.

We might not have a sense of it because we pick leaders and kick them out every four years in our democracy, which I think is as it should be. I'm not complaining.

But we don't have a good estimation of what it is to have a king die. Well, not so much Isaiah.

Isaiah, even in that statement, there's a foreboding that comes along.

In the year that King Uzziah died, Judah had enjoyed under this King Uzziah 52 years of peace and prosperity under his reign.

[2:32] He was one of the few good kings of Israel. He presided over peace and expansion of the nation. A reign in which Judah prospered economically and had rest, peace from its neighbors.

Isaiah tells us that in this year that this king died, he saw the Lord. The Lord here, the word for Lord in Hebrew is Adonai.

Adonai, meaning sovereign Lord. Not only sovereign Lord, but so King Uzziah will have been considered a sovereign as the king of his nation.

Queen Elizabeth is referred to as the sovereign. But here, Adonai means sovereign Lord of all. The earthly King Uzziah may be dead, but the true sovereign of the universe is still on his throne.

Kings of the earth come and go, but his rule is from everlasting to everlasting. So Isaiah saw the Lord. Such was the majesty of this Lord as he sits on his throne, high and lifted up, Isaiah tells us.

[3:52] That even so much that just the train of his robe filled the whole heavenly temple. Isaiah was confronted with this vision of God's glory as he is ushered into the very presence of the Lord.

Verse 2, he says, Isaiah paints a picture of the heavenly court.

Isaiah tells us that they have six wings.

One pair of their wings covered their faces because no creature, not even majestic heavenly beings, can behold the fullness of God's glory.

Another pair of wings covered their feet because their feet signifies their creatureliness. These are created beings and they must stand with covered feet before the uncreated one.

[5:21] And with the last pair of wings, we're told they flew around the throne of God. But all of these wonderful visions that Isaiah saw is just a prelude to what Isaiah hears from the mouth of the seraphim.

Their words explain more than anything the vision he sees. The angels, the seraphim are crying out in a call and response in an antiphonal cry, saying, Holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. Now, notice that in the beginning, Isaiah says, I saw the Lord, Adonai, the sovereign, Lord of all.

Here, the angels are using the covenant name of God when they said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.

Here, in the Hebrew, the Lord is now, Adonai, is Yahweh.

Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. He is the Lord of hosts. He is the God of the universe. The whole earth is full of his glory.

[6:42] This is the eternal song before the throne of God. We see it here in Isaiah, just as we heard it, read in Revelations chapter 4. That there is something of the Hebrew language that we ought to understand, or even all the Semitic language that we ought to understand.

Three times, Isaiah tells us, they cry in call and response, Holy, Holy, Holy. Now, we are used in our language, in our English language, to express, express things in increasing degree.

And how do we do so? We use the word greater. For example, the word great. We say greater, greatest, big, bigger, biggest. And if you want to confuse those who are not English speakers, we say good.

We don't say gooder though. We say better, best. But in Hebrew, to express something of great magnitude, or with intensification, you will repeat it.

So, if you read, for example, in the Old Testament, something that is of gold, that is of great value, would be referred to as gold, gold.

[8:04] For example, we see this in the Gospels, when Jesus says, Verily, verily, I say unto you. Jesus is in, Jesus is saying, in, in, in repeating that, listen up.

This is very important. truthfully, truthfully. Now, Jesus repeats it, and often times in the Hebrew language, he's repeated twice. In very rare circumstances, the ultimate superlative is used in the Hebrew language.

And the word is repeated three times. That's what's going on here. The seraphim are saying, God is holy. holy. But not only that, there is nothing that compares to him in his holiness.

Holy, holy, holy. Now, why is this the cry of the heavenly host throughout the Bible? After all, if they had cried out, that is the angels, if they cried out, powerful, powerful, powerful, or glorious, glorious, glorious, they would have been just as right to do so.

But instead, their cry is holy, holy, holy. Now, we are prone, we are prone to praise God's love, to praise God's mercy.

[9:29] We're even prone to praise his power and his justice. But here, the heavenly court, both in Isaiah chapter 6, verse 3, and in Revelation chapter 4, verse 8, they extol God's holiness above all of his other attributes because they know that all of God's attributes stems from his holiness.

God's holiness runs through his love, runs through his mercy, his justice. It runs through, as someone puts it, and makes all his other attributes shine.

holiness is God's supreme attribute by which all his other attributes shine through. God even swears by his holiness in the Bible, even as he swears by his name.

Because his holiness is synonymous with his name and with his being, the triune God is a holy God.

His holiness explains his otherliness. What I mean by that is his transcendence. Do you know that God is above and beyond the created world?

[10:50] There are other religions that try to imagine God as part of creation or imagine that we are part of God. All of that is blasphemy. God, the creator is distinct, separated from his creation.

Part of this separatedness of God is because of his holiness. Nothing else can touch him, can compare, is comparable to God in his holiness.

holiness. And because God is holy and holiness means to be separated, we know this because even things that are holy in our normal terms of use of that word are things that are devoted to God, are separated for God's use.

Right? So we can say even there this candle is holy and it is because it is used in God's house for worship. we say it of ourselves.

The reason why we are holy, we are saints and sacred ones, is because we are devoted to God. God has brought us with a prize and we are his.

[12:03] All things that are holy are only holy because they are only holy in relation to God's holiness. So to be holy is to be separated.

And we can only understand God's holiness as being separated ultimately to himself. God is devoted to who? Nothing else but himself because nothing else is as holy in comparison to him. God is devoted to himself, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are devoted to one another and bring glory to one another.

That is the preeminent reason and purpose of God. And by the way, that is the preeminent purpose of all things that are devoted to him in holiness as well.

That is our purpose, to bring glory to God because we are devoted to him. And in this triunity, they are completely and utterly separated from all other beings in their holiness.

[13 : 17] Holiness also means God is perfect, unblemished, without any stain. In fact, I think it's more proper to say that God is unblemishable.

I know that's not an actual grammatically correct, but it is more proper to say that God is unblemishable. He dwells in unapproachable light.

Now, you know the pagan gods might be depicted as powerful and mighty, but they cannot be said to be holy. Look at the Greek gods or the Norse gods.

Their conduct is often more solid than the humans that worship them themselves. Why is that? It's because they are really depictions after all of the human creators.

God is uncreated. He is not according to the imagination of men. And he is God because he is holy, separated, unblemishable.

[14 : 25] He cannot be God without all of his divine attributes. He cannot be God without his holiness especially. Now, nothing in all of creation can stand before God.

Why? Because God is holy. His holiness makes him utterly different from us. His holiness even makes him utterly different from the angels in heaven.

Notice that even the angels, these seraphims, their names actually means the burning ones. They stand before God still covering their eyes and covering their feet, their creatureliness because they stand before this utterly holy God.

Isaiah continues in verse 4 and he says, even as he sees this vision, the foundations of the thresholds of the heavenly court, of the heavenly temple, the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke.

Now, as I read this, I'm reminded of Mount Sinai as the mountain shook and it's filled with lightning and smoke as God descended to meet Israel at Mount Sinai.

[15 : 50] Here, even in the heavenly court, there is shaking and the court is filled with smoke. In fact, God's holiness makes him a consuming fire.

That's why the Bible describes him as a consuming fire. Nothing can stand before its perfection. I think that's why these angelic beings, are so named, as I said before.

Their names mean burning ones. They're called the fiery ones because they stand before the God who is himself a consuming fire. And even as they proclaim his name, smoke bellows and fills the temple.

Now, what's Isaiah's response to all of this? He says, woe is me, for I am lost, 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.

It's as if Isaiah, up to now, transfixed by the sight before him, finally came to himself and remembered where he is and before whom he stands.

[17 : 09] And now, he doesn't say, notice here, he doesn't say, wow, or cool, or wow, great effects, as if he's watching a wonderful display of fireworks.

That's not what Isaiah says as he sees all of this. Firstly, because what he sees is far beyond anything our earthly eyes or mind can really grasp, will conjure up.

So to try to use earthly visions or visions of earthly grandeur to describe what Isaiah sees or John says in Revelation 4 will be foolish.

No eyes have sinned, nor hear as heard. But secondly, Isaiah sees himself as he stands here that he is a man stricken with the realization that he is before the holiness of God.

and what comes upon him, a sense of trepidation. Fear gripped him. Great fear gripped him. Why?

[18 : 14] Because he stands before the Holy One of Israel, the One who is a consuming fire, the One whom no eye can behold and live.

So he cries out, Woe is me. I lost. I am a dead man. Why? Because he is a sinner before a holy God.

God's holiness consumes all imperfection before him. As Abacut says, God's eyes are too pure to see evil. And Isaiah faced with God's perfection, he becomes fully aware of his sinfulness.

That's always the way that leads to proper conviction and confession of sin, by the way. First, the realization of God's holiness is what is first needed in order for us to be fully aware of our sinfulness, of how we do not measure up.

That's always the way that leads to proper conviction and confession of sin. But often we are not fully aware, I think, of God's holiness. I think the world is not fully aware of God's holiness.

[19:33] The more we are aware of it, though, the more our sinfulness, the more our unworthiness is made clear to us, the more we recognize the need for a Savior.

The church today seems to have not much use for God's holiness. We'll rather talk of his love and of his mercy and of his justice, but we seldom reflect on his holiness, because doing so highlights our sin and unworthiness.

But that is exactly why the holiness of God must be reflected upon even more. That's the existential problem of humanity.

That is the existential problem of you and I. God's holiness. It's not our creatureliness that keeps us separated from God. It's not the fact that we are created beings that keep us separated.

Remember that when God made Adam and Eve, along with all of creation, he pronounced them good. The word good there in Genesis means that they are holy, because nothing can be good before God unless it is holy.

[20:45] and they are good because they are devoted to God in their holiness. What separated man from God? It was Adam's sin that separated them from God.

It is our sin in Adam that keeps us separated from God. So Isaiah seeing the angelic host pronounce God's name with their holy lips, recognize that Eve cannot join them in this holy proclamation.

He is a man of unclean lips, and he's from a people of unclean lips. People who have rejected the law of God, people who have repeated the sin of their father Adam in breaking covenant with God. As we read this, we ought to recognize that we stand with Isaiah as sinful, people, unworthy before God.

Now Isaiah also knows the consequence of what that means. He cries out, woe, for I am lost.

[22:01] He might as well have said, I am a dead man, I'm a goner. And he will be correct to say so. Because he knows there's nothing he can do to pay the debt he holds to God.

There is nothing his nation can do to pay the debt of their breaking covenant with this holy God. And in the midst of his despair, there's hope.

God, in his holiness, is also a God that displays mercy. Verse 6 tells us that one of the seraphim, one of these angels that stands before God's majesty, flew to Isaiah, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongues from the altar.

And he touched my mouth, Isaiah said. And the angel said to Isaiah, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for.

What Isaiah needs most, more than anything else, is that his sins will be forgiven. That is also the pressing need of every man and woman, of every boy and girl.

[23:28] And that is what he receives graciously from God. One of the fiery ones, one of the seraph, flew to him, taking a burning coal from the altar of incense, from before the throne of God.

Now, the significance of the altar cannot be lost here. The significance of the altar is that the place where Isaiah stands is God's heavenly temple, which the earthly temple in Jerusalem is just a shadow of.

The earthly temple in Jerusalem is a picture, a model of this heavenly temple that Isaiah is now before in his vision. And in the temple in Jerusalem, in the holy place, at the entrance to the most holy place, is the altar of incense.

There, God commands the high priest to burn incense twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. Now the burning of incense signifies the intercessory prayers of the high priest to God for the people.

It is from this altar, the real altar of incense in heaven, which signifies the prayer of the high priest that the coal is taken from.

[24:56] the angel takes the coal from the altar of incense, touched the mouth of Isaiah, the man of unclean lips. And with the burning coal, he pronounced mercy of God to him.

Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away. Your sin is atoned for. The effect was instantaneous. As this has touched your lips, your guilt has been taken away.

This is a judicial pronouncement from the court of heaven. Isaiah, you are justified, the angel says. Your guilt has been taken away. Your guilt has been placed on another. Your sin with its penalty has been atoned for.

The debt you hold that you can never repay has been ransomed by another. God the means by which Isaiah is forgiven is also the means that you and I are forgiven.

[26:03] The one whom Isaiah sees on that throne, John tells us in John 12 verse 40 that the one who sits on the throne, whose train fills the whole temple is Jesus Christ himself.

He is the one who sits high and exalted, whose train fills the temple. this same God, this same Lord of the universe, ruler of all, came down from that throne, took on our frail human flesh, paid for and atoned for our sins, bearing our sins and canceling by his atoning death, the guilt and the death that we hold God.

but not only that, this king of the universe, this Lord, is the high priest who prays in John 17 and continues to pray now even as he stands in the heavenly court.

Jesus prays for you. It is by his atoning intercessory prayer that you are justified. It is by his intercessory prayer that you are kept holy and devoted to God.

It's as if Isaiah, 800 years by the way, 800 years before Christ's birth, saw this vision of what his earthly ministry will be like, what his earthly ministry will accomplish, that this Lord is our substitute.

[27:47] This is to the honor and glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Through him you are redeemed, you are fellowship with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, why didn't Isaiah burn up when that coal touched his mouth? It's because God has indeed accomplished for him what the angel were pronounced.

Otherwise, he will have been consumed by the holiness of God. But, he stands forgiven. The pronouncement was immediate and instantaneous.

it's because he stands before the power of the triune God, the great I am, who is omnipresent. and the benefits of this triune God, who stands beyond time, is applied to Isaiah as he's applied to all the Old Testament prophets, and as he's applied to us, even now, today.

[29:00] Remember last week was Pentecost. We commemorated Pentecost. This is in Acts 2, we see another instance of this divine tongue, fire of God, appearing to rest, as Acts 2, 3 describe it, resting on the disciples.

This fire signifies God's presence, God's abiding, indwelling presence in the power of the Holy Spirit. And so to the New Testament believer, what Pentecost signifies is true of all of us who have come to faith in Jesus Christ.

God, the Holy Spirit, comes to dwell in you. And through him, through his indwelling, you have continued fellowship with God the Father and God the Son.

And what makes that possible? What makes it so that you are not consumed by God's indwelling holy, perfect presence?

It is because through Christ's atoning sacrifice and through his continued intercession as your high priest, your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.

[30:30] praise be to this God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.