

Isaiah's vision

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Preacher: Roderick John Campbell

[0 : 00] We now turn back to the portion of scripture that we read together in the prophecy of Isaiah and chapter 6. And we shall read from the beginning of the chapter.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple, and so on.

We shall, with the help of the Lord's Spirit, try and say a few things regarding verse 1 to 8. The first eight verses that we have in this chapter.

The book of Isaiah has more chapters than any other prophetic book. And it also includes Isaiah's unique prophecies regarding Emmanuel, God with us.

And it also has chapters that are devoted to the suffering servant. Isaiah, the son of Amos, was one of the most prominent citizens of the city of Jerusalem, having access to both the royal and priestly leadership of the nation of Judah.

[1 : 38] His name means Yahweh is salvation. The significance of his name is revealed in his prophetic ministry.

Because he came on the scene of Judah's history at a time when it was of the utmost importance for the people to realise that salvation was of the Lord, and not merely by human efforts.

Isaiah also found himself standing against the threat of Assyria. His life spanned the role of several kings.

He was born during the reign of Isaiah. And in his prophetic ministry, he became a very important figure during the reign of Hezekiah.

In fact, he was the chief advisor to King Hezekiah. Tradition claims that he was sown into two by Hezekiah's son, Manasseh.

[3 : 00] But here in chapter 6 of his prophecy, we believe that Isaiah recounts for us his original call to the prophetic ministry.

And the first point that we shall deal with is the timing. It is obvious that for some reason, Isaiah wanted to locate this vision that he received in time, in the year that King Uzziah died.

He is describing for us the exact period of time in which this occurred. So this must be of some significance.

Of course, Isaiah's reign was very beneficial to the nation of Judah. It was a time of considerable prosperity and success.

Probably it could be called the golden age of Judah. He was probably the greatest king since the days of Solomon.

[4 : 21] And along with Jeroboam II, who was king in Israel, they both engaged in an impressive program of military expansion, recovering most of the territory that Israel had at the height of Solomon's reign before the nation split into two.

But the ten tribes becoming the northern territory called Israel, and the southern tribes with two, that was Benjamin and Judah, and they took the name Judah unto themselves.

It was a proud time for them because of their military success. It was a time of political stability and a time of great prosperity.

Yet, in 2 Kings chapter 15 and 2 Chronicles chapter 26, we find that as it came near the end of his reign, that Isaiah lived in isolation and separation.

And that was due to divine displeasure. And that was due because he flouted God's holiness.

[5 : 56] Because of flouting God's holiness, the glory of God, as it were, broke in upon him, and he ended his days as a leper.

So it became a great warning to others. Israel's creed that the Lord was king, was no longer upheld by the nation.

And as a result of that, there were some ethical implications. The wealth was not evenly distributed among the people.

The rich became richer and the poor became poorer. Justice was bought and sold or simply disregarded and replaced by exploitation or by repression.

There was a great disregard for the things of God. It is often the case that increased wealth and prosperity brings about a diminished view of God.

[7 : 22] And we see that religiously, that Judah felt secure in their sins as long as they performed the appropriate rituals.

Is that not what the prophet brings before them at the beginning of his prophecies? Where God speaks to them through the prophet and says, To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifice unto me, saith the Lord?

I am full of the bond offerings of rams and of the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of eagles. When ye come to appear before me, you have required this at your hand to tread my course.

Bring no more vain oblations and senses and abomination unto me. The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I come away with.

It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hated. They are a trouble unto me. I am weary to bear them.

[8 : 35] And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash you. Make you clean.

Put away the evil of your doings. From before mine eyes, cease to do evil, and so on. However, five years before King Uzziah died, an ambitious and capable new ruler had come to empower in Assyria.

And he quickly took control of Babylon and through relentless campaigning, every state began to pay tribute to this new ruler on Assyria.

And it became clear through time that everything between Assyria and the land of Judah was now beginning to crumble. The writing was on the wall.

And at the time of Uzziah's death, the international scene was one that was very threatening. So, we see that it is in that situation or circumstance that Isaiah receives this vision.

[10 : 01] And what happens here is that Isaiah is taken beyond the earthly temple and he is brought to the heavenly temple, noting that the glory of the Lord is filling the heavenly temple.

Isaiah is elevated into the very throne room of God. And the word used for Lord here means the sovereign one, the one who is sovereign, the one who rules over all things, who is completely sovereign over all things.

Now, as we've already noted, the time of Isaiah's reign was a very prosperous one. But now, there is that threat of Assyria at their door.

And they are afraid of the Assyrians because the Assyrians were ruthless people. And they are afraid of them. And so, Isaiah, in vision, is elevated to see who is the sovereign one.

Who is the one that is ruling over all things. The sovereign one is seated on a throne.

[11 : 36] The picture here is of an exalted figure, the glorious king, whose holiness is manifested by its glory filling the heavenly temple.

In the year that King Uzziah died, the timing of it is significant. And the timing of this vision is important.

I saw also the Lord, the sovereign one, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

It is perhaps a matter of debate as to precisely who is being seen here. Though it is true that no one has ever seen God, for God in his essential being, he is a spirit.

Yet he has graciously condescended to make himself known through the second person. In the Gospel of John, in chapter 12, verse 41, after citing verse 9 and 10 of this chapter in Isaiah, John says, These things Isaiah said, when he saw his glory and spoke of him, that is, of Christ.

[13 : 18] We may even ask the question, has there ever been any communication between God and sinful man, but through a mediator?

Well, Isaiah was allowed to see the Lord. And our mind is filled with a sense of the majesty that belonged to what he saw.

He is sitting upon a throne, the place of authority and power, the place of great majesty.

Something like what John brings before us in the book of Revelation in chapter 4, where he says, And immediately I was in his spirit, and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne, and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone.

And there was a rainbow round about the throne, inside like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats. And upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment, and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

[14 : 39] And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.

There John gives us a picture of something that is very majestic. Something that is quite glorious, that is outshining.

It is full of majesty, full of power. And that is something like what Isaiah saw in this vision.

And above stood the seraphims. Each one had six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly.

The seraphims are angelic beings and are only mentioned as far as I know in this passage. The name itself literally means the burning ones.

[15 : 46] The burning ones. And here we are told that they covered their face, and they covered their feet, and they did fly.

This was a continuous action. The thought here is one of continuous action.

they are continuously covering themselves, and they are continuously flying. And these angelic beings are around this majestic throne.

And the language that is brought here before us, notice how the Lord is described by these seraphims, these creatures.

And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

[16 : 54] The key word is holy. And the word holy probably means something that is set apart, something that is very distinct.

earth. It means something that is set apart for a particular purpose.

Like the vessels of the tabernacle and the vessels of the temple were holy vessels. They were set apart. They were set apart for a particular purpose.

us. But it also carries the thought of brightness or shining forth. In Psalm 104, we read these words, regarding the Lord who covereth himself with light as with a garment.

We know from the scripture that he dwells in light which no man can approach. And as this word holy is applied to God, it denotes everything that is distinctive in God.

[18 : 13] It distinguishes God from all his creatures. It distinguishes God from all his creation. It sets him apart from all.

Now this concept of holiness or separatedness or distinctiveness was not something that was unknown to Israel, to the people of Israel.

Even the very formation that they took in every day was bringing this concept of holiness before them.

Remember how they were told about to take that which was evil or to take it outside the camp.

Certain sacrifices had to be taken outside the camp. Outside the camp was looked upon as a place that was very unclean.

[19 : 17] Very unclean. And then there was the camp itself. The camp was unclean, their dwelling place. And then they could come into the court of the tabernacle for instance, which was a clean place.

But then there was the holy place. And that was holy. But then there was the most holy place. And that was very holy. And they would have been growing up with this concept of very unclean and very holy.

This was always around them. Even in one of the psalms that we sung this evening, we see the marvel of grace, of God's compassion and grace and mercy towards us as he takes us from the dunghill, which is a very unclean place.

And he takes us from the dunghill and he sets us up as princes. As it were, we get access into the very throne room of God where he sets us up as princes.

You know, I very often think when I think of that thought, when I have that thought, I think of Mephibosheth who came from Lodibar, a barren, desolate place.

[20 : 38] And he came, and not only was he allowed to sit at the table of David the beloved, but David says to him, you will sit there as one of the king's sons, as my adopted son.

You will sit there as a prince. And that's what the grace of God does for me and for you. He takes us from the dunghill, from the very unclean place, and he takes us to sit at his table in fellowship and communion as a prince, as the son of the king, as one who is adopted into the family of the king. So this concept of holiness is always kept before the eye of Israel. There is a statement made to Israel, and to me and you tonight, God is holy.

God is of purer eye than to look upon iniquity. And yet, along with that statement comes a command, be holy because I, the Lord, your God, is holy.

And then along with that statement and command comes a promise, I am the Lord who makes you holy. Our holiness is totally dependent upon the grace of God and the spirit of God.

[22 : 31] So this concept of holiness is something that is always said before the eye of Israel and before my eyes and your eyes as well.

Now notice how the seraphim uses this word holy three times in succession. There are those who debate that this means that this has some significance regarding the Trinity.

Well, whether that be true or not, it is important for us to remember that this is not just a simple repetition.

But this is the Hebrew way of emphasizing that what they are saying is especially true and important.

By repeating the same word three times, holy, holy, holy, they are emphasizing that what they are saying is true.

[23 : 38] And what they are saying is important. You find Jesus in his own day saying truly, truly. And that whole repetition is to emphasize, to stress the truth of what he is saying and the importance of what he is saying.

And that's what the seraphim, I believe, is doing here. They're emphasizing the truth of what they're saying and the importance of what they're saying. Holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

We find in the chapter that we refer to in Revelation the same thing. We woke up the throne of God and how majestic that throne was.

But I just want you to note this also about the picture that we have in Revelation 4. And that is, although the Lamb isn't there as we find later on in this picture in the book of Revelation, there is something that is important around that throne.

There is the rainbow. There is the sign of the covenant. However sovereign and majestic the picture is brought before us, it is also brought before us that he's a covenant God.

[25 : 02] that there is a covenant around that majestic throne. But coming to the point I want to raise, they were told here that there were four beasts and each of them had six wings about them and they were full of eyes within and the rest not day and night saying, holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, which was and is to come and when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne who liveth forever and ever again.

We find the same picture of these beasts that are out of the throne and they're crying out holy, holy, holy to the almighty sovereign, to the almighty God.

The same thing again, stressing the truth and the importance of what they are crying. These heavenly beings cry aloud to God in precisely the same language as the seraphim.

So this emphasis teaches us that if there is one thing about God that is supremely important, it is his holiness.

his moral glory, his holiness, his distinctiveness from everything in his creation and the perfection and beauty of his character is embodied in his holiness.

[26 : 44] God is holy. God is holy. glory. And one cried unto another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. That's another important word used by the seraphim. Glory. glory. This is important because the glory of God is really the outshining of all that he is.

The outshining of all that he is. The root meaning of the word glory is weight or heaviness. And since the weight of something frequently reflects the worth of something.

Glory came to mean that which gave something or someone honor or made him worthy of respect. the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

[28 : 03] God reveals his glory in various ways. He has done it in creation. The heavens declare the glory of God. But supremely God has manifested his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

He has revealed his glory to us in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the express image of God's glory.

And men and women saw his glory veiled in flesh during the incarnation, during his time of humiliation. His glory in those days were veiled by his flesh.

It was very carefully veiled. But now and again, it did break forth. For instance, on the Mount of Transfiguration, there was that glorious moment when Peter, James, and John saw something that they could neither understand or even describe.

the Lord began to shine forth. Later on, does not Peter say that when they were on this mount, there were eyewitnesses of his majesty?

[29 : 37] Is that not what, is that not the glory that the Lord is pleading in that prayer that he prayed just before he entered into the garden of Gethsemane?

Outside the gates of the garden, is he not making this prayer to God? Oh Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

But there is another place where God manifests his glory and that is in the lives of his people.

Again going back to that prayer of John 17 Jesus says and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them that they may be one even as we are one.

Paul writing to the church at Corinth says but we all with open face beholding us in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

[30 : 52] You see God's design is to manifest his glory not only in the heavens not only in the created order and the face of Jesus Christ but to manifest his glory in the lives of his redeemed people his redeemed people you know that this is part of I believe what Adam would have lost in the fall he came short of the glory we came short of the glory of God this outshining this brightness that will be ours one day it shall be restored to us what we're made like into

Christ is that not what Paul looks forward to who shall change our vile body and make it like unto his glorious body his body of glory this outshining and brightness that belongs to the glorified body of Christ now in heaven will one day belong to me and you yes he will we will only reflect that glory the source of that glory will be Christ but we shall reflect his glory we shall reflect his glory will be like the moon is the moon reflects the glory of the sun that's what gives the light the glory of the sun and we shall like the moon reflect the glory of the son of righteousness of the son of God of our saviour Jesus Christ the response then to

God's holiness as brought before us here even from the unfallen creation the seraphims for they were creatures but they were unfallen creatures notice how their wings were employed one pair of wings covered their faces even the unfallen creatures cannot gaze on the holiness of God uncovered the sight would in some sense be more than even the unfallen creation could bear they cover their faces for they cannot bear this burning glory of God this burning glory of God which is the holiness of God remember how the writer to the Hebrews reminds us he says that we worship God with reverence and with godly fear for our God is a consuming fire he's a consuming fire he is in there in burning glory burning holiness remember the burning bush of

Moses remember how the glory of God was there because God was present in the bush another pair of wings that cover their feet Professor Young thinks that this is a gesture of humility and modesty they are recognizing that in the presence of the holiness of God they need some covering they need some covering and we need some covering and we are covered through the righteousness of Christ and it is only as those covered with that covering that we can have standing before the holiness of God and the third pair of wings as they fly it's employed in enabling them to be swift in the glad service of a glorious God they cry to one another their minds are engaged in the task of communicating with one another about the holiness and the glory of

God cry out one and to another and said holy holy holy is the Lord of force the whole earth is full of his glory and then what happens and the post of the door moved at the voice of him that cried and the house was filled with smoke the whole temple building is affected by the presence of the holy one that sits upon the throne shaking is the customary reaction of earth to the divine presence remember how when the Lord came down on Mount Sinai there we are told in Exodus that the whole mountain shook the presence of God God now I just want perhaps to throw something in at this point perhaps for yourselves to think about I wonder if there was any significance in the two earthquakes that took place at

[36 : 30] Golgotha and in the garden surrounding Golgotha there was an earthquake when the Lord died there was an earthquake when he rose again I just wonder what the significance of these earthquakes were here we find that the divine presence the doorposts of the door moved there's a shaking of the temple a shaking of Mount Sinai a shaking of the earth when the Lord died and rose again the concentration here on the doorposts is I think very significant because it is telling us that Isaiah cannot enter into the divine presence just as a smoke forbids him to see God and the house was filled with smoke again that's not a new idea is it remember how on the day of atonement as a priest high priest of Israel went in to the most holy place one day in the year on the day of atonement and he went in with the blood to sprinkle it there had to be incense sprinkled first of all and the smoke of the incense had to fill the most holy place before he could enter in and it is something similar to that that

Isaiah sees here the house is filled with smoke there is as it were total exclusion and why is there this total exclusion well I think verse five tells us how the facts of verse four are to be interpreted then said I woe me for I am undone for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for my knives has seen the king the lord of hosts Isaiah cries out and he cries out as it were in despair and distress because of this vision that he has seen now of the holy one he says woe me I am ruined I am finished I am without hope I am undone woe me for I am undone this word undone in the

Hebrew means to be dumb or to be silent he said I am silent I am speechless with the sight that I have seen of the holiness of God I am speechless I am undone I am finished I am without hope you see the overwhelming reason for this cry of Isaiah for this state of distress and conviction is the defilement of his own sin in the light of the holiness of God he sees himself and he sees how defiled he is he becomes aware of his defilement when he is brought into the presence of the burning holiness of God oh he says woe is me I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the king the lord of hosts why is there this allusion to lips well it may be that it reminds him of king usiah who was a leper and he would have to cover his his lip and cry out unclean unclean and his mind goes back to the king usiah

I would cover his upper lip and I would cry out unclean unclean unclean and here is Isaiah and he says I am a man of unclean lips I am I have a leprosy yes not in the flesh but in my nature in my heart I have a leprosy and to aggravate his guilt he confesses that he accepted the unclean speech in his own society and made no attempt whatsoever to separate himself from it for I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the king the lord of hosts but you see Isaiah's experience of God's holiness had another and a more wonderful dimension to it then flew one of the seraphims unto me having a live coal in his hand which he had taken with the tongues from off the altar and he laid it upon my mouth and said lo this has touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged he now begins to know the cleansing transforming touch of the same God who crushed him to the ground who made him speechless who made him cry out I am undone now he sees another side another touch of the same God which is healing you see God's aim or purpose perhaps I should say is that he might be a partaker of that holiness God the writer to the Hebrews says again that God's dealings with us and chastisement and God's dealing with us is that we might be made partakers of his holiness God has planned for us to be partakers of his holiness for without holiness no man can see God blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God a seraphim flies to the altar by the command of God notice here that it's God that takes the initiative it's all of God's grace it's all of God's kindness of his mercy it is God that takes initiative and he commands the seraphim to fly to the altar the altar here well there can be debate upon whether it was the altar in the outer court or whether it was

[43 : 39] I'm not going to spend time debating that with you this evening what I see here is God's provision for sinners what I see here by the altar is that it's a place of atonement a place of propitiation a place that deals with the anger of God with the wrath of God against sin a place of satisfaction where God's justice is satisfied where everything that is required by God is brought to satisfaction I also see the altar as a place of forgiveness of cleansing and reconciliation everything that is needed for the sinner is at the altar everything required by God is at the altar and everything needed for the sinner is at this altar the altar of atonement the seraphim flies and the seraphim takes a live coal and then lays it on Isaiah's lips that place where he was most conscious of his sin and then the gospel is preached to him lo this hath touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away

and thy sin is purged this was a work of cleansing coming from the altar of atonement this has touched your lips and your iniquity went the action is instantaneous as soon as the one happened the other also happened as soon as it touched his lips his iniquity was taken and you know where it says here that the iniquity has been taken where it's lo thou has touched thy lips and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged it brings before us that in all this action it is all of

God it is all of God you see he paid the ransom price this is how one of the commentators puts it we speak of a sum of money as sufficient to pay our debt so atonement is the payment of whatever divine justice sees as sufficient to cover the sinner's debt the death of the substitute sacrifice on the altar the atonement is the payment of whatever divine justice sees as sufficient to cover the sinner's debt and what was that it was the death of the darling of heaven it was the death of the son of God as the substitutionary sacrifice on the altar of Calvary that was the price that had to be paid so what we have here in Isaiah 6 and 7 is a prophetic glimpse of a supreme place where God was to bring his holiness and his mercy together where they were to kiss mutually and where was that but at the cross of the

Lord Jesus Christ and as I've already said you know the triune God was there the divine presence was there yes the earth trembled yes the sun was darkened but at this time it was the Lord Jesus the son of God the one who was in the bosom of the father that cried out woe to me for I am undone my God my God why hast thou forsaken me a quote from psalm 22 a psalm that the Lord Jesus would have known and here he cries out he quotes psalm 22 why my God my God why hast thou forsaken me and he receives the answer from psalm 22 as we go to verse 3 for thou art holy the Lord

Jesus knew why he had been forsaken my God my God a repetition again to stress the truth and the importance of what his experience was in the forsaken ness because God is holy when sin was reckoned to his only beloved son God had to deal with that sin because God is holy by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ God was procuring for us redemption designed to restore God's glory in God's creation and wonder of wonders enabling us to become the bearers of his holiness when we shall be made like into the glorious body of

Christ again shining forth shining forth with glory reflecting the glory of God reflecting the glory of God and then just finally and briefly verse 8 also I heard the voice of the Lord saying whom shall I send and who will go for us then said I here am I send me service you see when Isaiah's iniquity and sin was dealt with at the altar of atonement he immediately wanted to serve God and that is what is required of me and you to serve God in whatever capacity as parents as people in the community as in the church at home as neighbors to serve

[50 : 45] God here am I he says send me send me it now becomes apparent why the lips of Isaiah has been so prominent perhaps in verse 5 to 7 because the Lord seeks a messenger and Isaiah now cleansed he is ready and he is willing to be the mouthpiece of God he is willing to use his lips now for God's service all the words of another prophet do they not come to mind here who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage he retaineth not to sanger forever because he delighteth in mercy he will turn again he will have compassion upon us he will subdue our iniquities and thou will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea that is the

God that is brought here before us a God who is holy of purer eye than to look upon sin but a God who delights in mercy and who has provided mercy and redemption for sinners like me and you what we could not do he has done and he has done it at a great cost the son of his bosom he sent into the world he reckoned our sins upon him he laid upon him the iniquities of us all and where the sin was reckoned to him he had to deal with them and so we understand something of the forsakenness for God is holy and in the light of God's holiness Isaiah saw himself but he was also made aware of

God's provision for him in Jesus Christ maybe maybe in our generation maybe in our own day we have lost this concept of the holiness of God and with it went our concept of what sin really is holiness and with it went the concept of understanding the wonder of God's grace and mercy in the provision of the cross of Calvary you know our conception of sin and of the work of the cross of the work of Jesus Christ and of redemption can only be properly understood in the light of God's holiness we need a day to come when that will be impressed upon us once more and may the Holy Spirit come and impress it upon our people the holiness of God wherein we shall see ourselves wherein we shall have a proper understanding of the cross of

Golgotha and the wonder and marvel of God's grace and to night at the beginning of your communion will we not rise from our pew and will we not leave this place by crying out the words of the prophet oh who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage he retaineth not his anger forever because he delighteth in mercy may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray eternal and ever blessed God we give thanks unto thee that thou art a covenant God that even in the midst of the majesty of thy throne there was the covenant sign and we give thanks that in the fullness of time that there is the lamb in the midst of the throne the fulfillment of that covenant is in the midst of the throne and we give thanks oh Lord that all thy dealings with us is as a covenant God a God who delighteth in mercy a God for whom judgment is a strange word we we ask oh Lord that thou would continue with the congregation here over the coming days and that thou would bless thy servants who will come and the people who will assemble and all that we ask is in Jesus name and for his sake Amen