

Glimpses of Glory God's Holiness

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Date: 16 April 2023

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[0 : 00] We are in a season of church called Glimpses of Glory and Grace. We're in the book of Isaiah.

700 years before the life of Jesus, a man called Isaiah spoke God's words to the kings of Jerusalem. They were words of judgment, predicting the nation's rebellion against God. They were also words of hope in a redeemer who God would raise up to pay for the sin of God's people and turn away God's wrath. Isaiah's words in the impact that he made outlived the kings that he served and even Isaiah himself.

Isaiah's words spoke directly into the spiritual needs of God's people and they speak to our needs too. These chapters are glimpses of God as glorious and gracious.

All people need something more glorious than what they can find in this world. And all people need grace if God is who he says he is.

[1 : 17] He's so wonderful and amazing and perfect and powerful and mighty and majestic that we're going to need his help. If we, the broken people of this broken world, are going to come to him.

You and I need Isaiah, this book, in our life. Theologian Tim Chester says that Isaiah is like a bridge.

A bridge between our side of history and the cross of Jesus Christ, reaching back to the origins of a nation called Israel, who God chose to be his people.

Isaiah is a bridge, a connection for those who find forgiveness in freedom in the Messiah in 2023. But also for those who knew the Messiah only as a promise.

A gracious promise that one day he would save the then divided nation of Israel and Judah through his coming Messiah King.

[2 : 37] Every year we quote Isaiah at Easter time and at Christmas. It's because of these many glimpses that Isaiah gives us of who this Messiah is going to be.

What his nature is going to be. What he's going to do. What his kingdom is going to look like. Even how he's going to be born. How he's going to die. Isaiah has unrivaled depth and clarity.

It's the coolest pair of sunnies in the Old Testament. That we get to look through and see who the Messiah is going to be. So in this series you're going to see that the God of the Old Testament that we hear about in Isaiah is the same God that in history is recorded in the New Testament.

He is most holy. He brings justice and fair judgment for sin. He is by nature merciful, loving and compassionate.

Providing hope to all nations. I honestly can't wait to share more of Isaiah. The bridge of Isaiah with you. As we see glimpses of this glorious and gracious God.

[3 : 51] So we're going to start in chapters 1 to 5. And then as we go through today we're going to get to Isaiah 6.

And we're going to spend most of our time there in Isaiah 6 as Anne has read out. Thank you Anne. So let's open up our Bible. Make sure we've got Isaiah open. Turn to chapter 1.

And I'm going to, no, I'm not going to read the whole thing. We're going to start our journey and step across this bridge.

Isaiah is a bit like watching an opera. Or a symphony. Or a musical. Like these, Isaiah begins with an overture.

An overture is a musical preview. It contains all, many of the melodies that are to come in the performance.

[4 : 53] The emotional movements of the story to come. We might not know why the tune sounds like that yet. But the overture gives us that feeling and the gravity of what's going to come next.

Just without all the details. It opens our ears and focuses our minds. So let's listen to three melodies that we're going to hear through Isaiah.

In Isaiah's prophetic overture. The first melody is this intimidating and fearsome, unstoppable melody of judgment and exile.

God himself says, I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. God pronounces judgment after judgment.

Woes on his people. He foreshadows a time of loss and pain in chapters 1 to 5. Like it's already happening to Israel.

[6 : 02] He even calls Israel by two awful names. Sodom and Gomorrah. Two cities that were judged for their exceptional wickedness.

As he was to those two cities. God is weary of Israel's wickedness and empty prayers. This melody is bleak.

And Isaiah uses imagery to help us understand how bleak it is. These are the different instruments that are playing this melody.

Here are a few. Their fall be like the shattering of a mighty falling tree. Like seductive women who will have their beauty taken away.

Like staggering drunks who are deceived and pushed by evil people into pits. Like fools led by children. They're going to wildly go astray.

[7 : 09] Isaiah even sings. Told you it was a musical. He sings this mournful love song. I will sing for the one I love about a song about his vineyard.

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel. And the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in.

He looked for justice but saw bloodshed. For righteousness but heard cries of distress. Can you hear the melody? Can you hear the main theme of this overture?

It's terrifying. But interwoven with woe after woe, horror after horror, are these two sweet melodies. And as we go through Isaiah, as you read through Isaiah yourself, and as we explore it as a church, I want to encourage you to be looking for these and listening for these two melodies in the symphony of Isaiah.

[8 : 15] And the first is the soft call of grace. In chapter one, we can see that there is forgiveness.

There is a chance for Israel and Judah, God's people, to turn things around. God says to them, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. And how will God do this? How could God be leading Israel to ruin and also make them pure before him?

Well, we get a glimpse of a name in this tune. In chapter four, verse two, the name of this redeemer, this one who will save, is called the branch of the Lord, one who will bring shelter and cleansing to the people of this broken, wayward vineyard.

And then melody number two, after the chords crash with a crescendo and there's the empty space after in this overture.

[9 : 38] There's these ever so quiet promises of eternal hope. Isaiah 1.26 says that there will be a day where Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, will be restored forever.

And later, in chapter two, that every nation will gather to live for God there in joy. In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains.

It will be exalted above the hills and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come to it and say, come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths. A day of restoration is coming. One to five of Isaiah, the overture, promises that Isaiah as a whole is going to sound like overwhelming judgment, especially for our ears thousands of years later.

But keep listening to those recurring melodies of the grace of God and his promise of forgiveness and eternal hope. God will bring justice and redemption for his multi-ethnic people and he will declare them holy.

[11 : 12] Holy. But now the movement of the symphony unfolds in chapter six. The orchestra crescendos into something new and the curtains part and the cast come out to start the first number and so we see what will happen next.

So I'm going to pray before we explore further in Isaiah chapter six. Let's pray. God, you have all authority.

You're gracious and you bring hope. So I ask that you would graciously change us through the words of this old book. Speak to us as if promised by your Holy Spirit so that we see you for who you've always been, who you were to Israel, who you were to Isaiah and who you will always be to us.

Amen. Amen. When I first moved to Sydney, it was mid-2000s and everyone I met when they were talking, when I was getting to know them, they would talk about a season of life that came before when I wasn't in Sydney and the season of life now that I kind of knew and understood.

Chatswood looked very different. The train station was a totally different shape. Right now, I'd need a map of how it used to be to try and remember it.

[12:51] Everything is so different just over there. Everyone I met when I came to Sydney, when I was getting to know them, marked time by talking about a season of life before, something happened and life now.

And that event happened in 2001 because people would say before September 11 or after September 11.

Terrorist attacks in the USA changed the world on September 11. If you're new to Chatswood, you might be hearing the same thing. If you're new to Sydney, you might hear people talk about a before COVID and an after COVID.

The event that's brought incredible insecurity and anxiety. After COVID, identities were changed, redefined.

After COVID, everything is different and we will never be the same, even if we might want everything to be the same again. In Isaiah's time, the southern kingdom of Israel had been reigned over by King Uzziah for 50 years.

[14:19] Judah had prospered. The people had followed God. They'd even have peace from war. But a northern kingdom called Assyria rose up in great military power and began to annihilate some of the surrounding nations of Judah.

But as long as King Uzziah was still alive, Judah had hope that they would be saved. But as Judah started to look elsewhere other than God for other powerful nations to trust, hope started to slide away and then it plummeted because Isaiah marks his time in chapter 6 with this terrible event. In the year King Uzziah died. Here's why you need to pay attention to Isaiah 6. In the year King Uzziah died, when fear was raining and everyone began to realise that they might not have any hope for their future, God miraculously showed up.

He showed Isaiah someone that would help him survive and even thrive. And our time is not Isaiah's, but after COVID, we too desperately need to see what Isaiah saw.

So what did Isaiah see? Isaiah says in verse 1, I saw the Lord. Now the word here is not the common Old Testament Lord in capital letters, which is in Hebrew that's Yahweh, Israel's special name for God.

[16:20] Rather, Israel is literally saying, in the year King Uzziah died, I saw the King, the Lord.

The scene is like heaven smashed down into the temple as Isaiah walked in one day.

We have a couple of visitors who I've met this morning. Imagine you show up to church, you take a step inside and you see this. Isaiah sees the Lord, the King, on a throne, on a high platform, and His robe filled the entire floor.

The temple was about the size of the floor space, the outer grassy knoll area of Chatswood Concourse. Or maybe picture a football field, a soccer field, football, soccer.

But a soccer field, that's the size of the space and God's majestic robe, symbol of His power and impressiveness, fills that old space.

[17:46] Not only is it totally impractical, but it's just incredible. God, the Lord, the King, is beyond impressive.

And Isaiah knew who He was immediately. King. And then Isaiah sees who attends this King, the Seraphim.

Two beings stand huge above the King. King. They have six wings, covering themselves with four and flying with two, uniquely created for this throne room worship.

Have a look in your Bible at how they're described. Have a look right now. can you picture that?

Can you imagine what Isaiah is describing in only a few words? I googled it this week. I'm more confused than ever before about how these things look.

[19 : 00] And I can tell you that no artificial intelligence computer is going to be able to give me the picture that's any more impressive, not even getting close to the amazing sight that this would have been for Isaiah.

But these two Seraphim, they call to one another. Their job is to speak about what is true. They don't qualify anything, there's no nuance.

They're like a toddler who when a plane flies overhead just yells at the top of their voice, no matter what's happening, no matter what they should be doing, no matter if it's quiet, they just go, plane! Because there's a plane. Or if they're standing in the kitchen and you're trying to get them to listen and they point to the oven and they just yell hot!

Just because that's true. These creatures simply exist to declare the obvious, the incredible majesty of the king that they serve.

[20 : 10] Here's what they say, verse 3, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

Their foundation shaking voices declare who God is. He's holy, but he's not just holy. holy. In Hebrew conversation, repeating a word twice emphasizes its quality.

In 2 Kings 25, there are bowls described, and they're not just gold bowls, but they're gold gold. And in English, that would be purest gold, or finest gold.

Jesus, in the Gospels, is said to have often begun his preaching with truly, truly, which means this is the truest truth.

The equivalent would be if a married couple are getting married over here, and the ceremony's about to start, and the brides come down the aisle, and the blubbing mess of the groom is standing there, and he takes her hand and says, you are beautiful, beautiful.

[21 : 41] Or, like my daughter said to me a couple of weeks ago, this is not quite the same, but it's nearly there, in a world of fake news, what you have to do now is to say, this is a true fact.

A fact is a fact, fact, but we don't say fact, fact, we now say true fact, or this is news, news. But the Israelites would never repeat a word three times, wouldn't make sense, unless something is so impressive, it doesn't happen anywhere else in the Bible, unless they're talking about God's holiness.

holiness. He's not just holy, he's not just holiest, but holy, holy, holy. Holiness is the defining attribute of the king.

This holiness is not just a goodness or a righteousness, though it is, but it also describes this king's transcendence, his all-ruling authority, his complete and incomparable majesty.

He's totally set apart from anything else, in perfection, in power, and in wisdom. Nothing is holy compared to him. He's the three times holy king.

[23 : 11] He's so much more than our languages can capture. But this is already a big problem for Isaiah.

Isaiah's fallen body is buckling. His senses are searing with God's holiness. The sound of the voices, the smell of the smoke, the ground quaking under his feet, the bending beams of the walls. And Isaiah's cry in response to the holiest holiness of God, the king, is, woe to me, I am ruined. And there's that word again. our melodies from our overture prepared us. But now that melody is ringing out in a scene that's not about the whole nation of Israel, it's just about one man.

It's just about Isaiah. He realises that he is part of Israel's deserving of ruin. God has promised that what is happening for Israel, because they do not turn to him, and will not turn to him, he's a part of that uncleanness that leads to that horrible, horrible fate that is coming.

[24 : 31] And he literally says in Hebrew, I am disintegrating. All that is me is falling apart. His very identity, his strength and reputation, everything is undone before this holy God.

And when he sees God's holiness, he immediately discovers how unsafe he is before the king. the smoke and the noise and the earthquake, they're not just epic.

It's not just an impressive smoke and light show at the beginning of this production. It's a prequel to divine wrath. Isaiah was a preacher, he's a prophet, he spoke to kings, he was known.

His lips were laced with the very words of God, but even Isaiah, strength and good life couldn't stand up to a comparison of the creator and judge.

This is not the vision Isaiah might have wanted in the year Uzziah died, but it's what he needed. He needed to see that Israel, that Judah, needed a miracle of grace from the Lord, the king.

[26 : 03] If we were to see the holiness of God, the true holiness of God in that moment, we would react just like Isaiah.

Know in a moment that our future is totally hopeless. We haven't measured up to God's holiness. holiness. In fact, we only have our sin revealed in his holy light.

We too are completely exposed before the king, and we too need that same miracle of grace. So what happens next? Don't worry, there's no cliffhanger, but I am going to start by pointing out what does not happen next.

I don't know whether it's Hollywood or just the stories that we like or the stories we read or the ways we hope things will end, but what does not happen is Isaiah's not secretly revealed as good enough to stand before God.

There's no secret magic words that he went found on a scroll, on a mountain, in a cave, to be able to stand before God, and God doesn't see some kind of mysterious good in him, like in some Hollywood script, because God's holy, there's no optimistic way out.

[27 : 32] Isaiah's sin, everyone's sin, must be paid for. God being completely perfect and righteous, means that wrath is the only option, and Isaiah should die right there.

But he doesn't. Have a look with me at verse 6. Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar, 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.

In Hebrew, atoned for literally means here, paid for. God has paid for Isaiah's sins in this moment.

God's wrath. How? How? If this is not done fairly, then God is not holy. This is really important.

How can Isaiah's sins be paid for? In the Bible, fire and smoke and flames are all imagery associated with God's wrath.

[29 : 00] a coal is that leftovers after a fire. And this coal is the leftover coal from the fires of wrath that have been spent burning up a sacrifice.

In the temple, the center was the altar, where offerings were brought and burnt. A sacrifice died in a swap, a swap of judgment because the one who offered up that sacrifice had their death for their sin substituted, swapped, and paid for by that sacrifice.

This atonement was at the heart of temple worship. And for the nation of Israel, it ritually purified someone. It never forgave them and removed their guilt for good though, because more sacrifices were always needed in season or as sins were committed.

But there's no mention here of what died on the altar. God offered it.

Israel didn't bring anything for himself to that moment. God did. A sacrifice has been burnt on the altar and the fire of wrath is out.

[30 : 31] And the coals that are left are used to show the power of that sacrifice. The leftover coal is this singeing symbol on Isaiah's lips.

Isaiah's sins are atoned for and paid for by whatever or whoever paid for them on the altar. God is a holy king and sin has been justly removed and he's gracious in this.

Isaiah is changed in that moment from unholy to forgiven and holy. God provides that sacrifice for forgiveness of Isaiah's sins yet Isaiah did nothing here but be afraid.

He sacrificed nothing and he got this purifying forgiveness and was made holy to stand before a holy God and this is great news for him and it's also great news for Israel for all who hear it.

So God asks whom shall I send? Who will go for us? And Isaiah is ready and he says me. His identity that had disintegrated before God has been rebuilt on this new solid rock this foundation of grace from the Lord the King and Isaiah's obedience is joyful he's willing to tell everyone he meets about what this King is like but will God's people hear how will God's people respond have a look at verse 9 be ever hearing but never understanding be ever seeing but never perceiving make the heart of this people calloused make their ears dull and close their eyes otherwise they may see with their eyes and hear what they is and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed oh no how could this be the music's changed again we're back to that horrifying melody from the overture verse 11 then I said for how long

[32 : 52] Lord has he answered till the cities line ruined 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 no Lord stop the song I know this melody change the channel is there no hope at all verse 13 second half of verse 13 but as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they're cut down so the holy seed will be the stump in the land at the end of that verse all three of our melodies

are playing at once it's a song of sorrow and grace and hope of wrath and justice and love all at once there is hope from the roots left in the ground the holy seed is gonna grow and there's that word again holy only God is holy unless he graciously makes someone holy by forgiving their sin so to do this

God is gonna plant a holy thing in the soils of Israel holy seed and that is the hope Isaiah has in this moment even while no one's gonna listen to him all is not lost and we know who the holy seed is it is Jesus in God's son we saw this holy seed die as buried in the ground so that it could grow life the holy seed is the sacrifice Isaiah's mystery on the altar is solved Jesus was sacrificed for the sin of all who would believe in him not on the temple altar but on a timber beam on a hill where the wrath of God was endured and quenched

God's holiness held true and just as was done on the altar of the cross see that's how this bridge that Isaiah is that's how it works we see from our time looking back what Isaiah and what Israel could not yet we know who that sacrifice on the altar that in this image who he was it was Jesus but unlike Isaiah we see his holy life recorded in the gospels we see our unholy ending enacted at the cross lived out and died for us what a saviour in the year King Isaiah died God revealed himself as a holy and gracious king after

COVID in 2023 this Easter we remembered a man who was crucified on a hill outside Jerusalem and written on his cross in a sign for all to see were the words this is Jesus the King of the Jews the King was crucified the King on the throne stepped down and took off his robe of glory he made himself nothing he was born as a man he lived a holy life he was crowned not with a crown of gold but of thorns he didn't wear a robe he was stripped naked and he wore our wrath and died in shame that is how far this holy king will go to make unholy people holy the king sacrifices himself and that's not even the end because he is not dead he is risen and he reigns in glory the king is gracious so much so that he made an offering for Isaiah's sin by offering himself as the sacrifice and we now know him as the king

Jesus of Nazareth king of the Jews once you see Jesus you'll only want to keep seeing this king so I want to encourage you as we step through this season in Isaiah challenge yourself to read this book to listen to this symphony as you read a chapter a day four or more times a week glimpse God's glory and grace here in Isaiah open up the gospels in these school holidays and see the king king Jesus over and over helping you see that he is holy and gracious to you and to all people in the words of a book you have the sight that you need to see now after covid after whatever the season seeing the king in the word is who you need and how you grow and thrive wherever you are in your time right now and these are the words the world need to hear for those who follow this king if you follow Jesus will you say with

[39 : 37] Isaiah here am I send me Jesus the king just like in Isaiah says in Matthew 28 all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me therefore go and make disciples of all nations the holy king has placed into our holy made hands a holy message of repentance and forgiveness and grace to all peoples of all nations so if you know Jesus will you fearlessly trust this holy king to share the message of his grace with someone who does not know him he does not see him and maybe is even hostile to him and if you don't know Jesus yet and if you want to receive this gift of grace in Jesus Christ come to the altar come to the cross respond even now as we sing come speak to me come speak to Carmen or Rachel and why not even start praying right now that God would help you see what Isaiah saw and with

Isaiah receive with joy the gift of grace to stand forgiven before your king before God because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ let's pray God we all need to see that you are the king we cannot stand before you but because of Jesus we can receive forgiveness he is our sacrifice he pays for sins so we can stand in your presence we look forward to the day when people from all nations will join with Isaiah in worship and we claim that forgiveness today we commit ourselves to the king king Jesus and until then and for all eternity we are your people so send us to tell all nations of your holiness and grace amen