

# Your God is too Small

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Preacher: Professor Bob Ackroyd

[ 0 : 00 ] And I would just like to introduce our guest preacher this morning, Reverend Dr. Bob Ackroyd. He's no stranger to the islands, but it's appropriate to give him an introduction. Bob came from the east coast of America and came over to study history, the history of the nations of the United Kingdom.

And in doing that, he found the God of history and his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's been a great benefit to the free church down through the years.

Bob has served on numerous committees. He was chairman of the mission board. He was on a number of other committees as well and has done great work in the church, becoming moderator in 2023.

He's also been involved in prison ministry in Edinburgh, ongoing in that prison ministry. And it's been amazing to hear what he's been doing there and the way that he's been taken in by the prisoners.

It's wonderful to see that the Lord's people are able to go into these situations and provide help to people who are in need.

[ 1 : 17 ] So we are so grateful that he's been able to join us today and he will now take over the service. And I've asked him to go to the main door after the service where he can meet with you.

And one thing I would say is, if you've ever been at a camp with Bob, don't be surprised if he knows your name. Absolutely amazing the way he's able to remember people.

So if you, and that's decades ago, people who have been at camp with him decades ago, he still remembers their name. Bob, I'll hand over to you. Thank you, Margo. Well, may I add my welcome and warm good morning to you.

I was asked specifically by our principal to convey the greetings of Edinburgh Theological Seminary. I think you may be familiar with Ivor Martin, so he sends his warm greetings to you all. And we at the seminary are delighted to serve the church. And it's a great privilege on an occasion like this to be able to preach here and to share fellowship with you all.

[ 2 : 22 ] So let us, we're going to, I should say, Murdo mentioned camp. I'll put a plug in. I'm leading a camp this summer in Renfrew. If there are any senior boys and girls, particularly boys, S3 and above.

If you're interested in go-karting and escape rooms and hill climbing. Anyway, camps are a great ministry of this church.

And if you're a young person here or you're parents of young people and you haven't considered camp, maybe this year might be a great opportunity of sending some of the young people of this congregation of this town to camp, even for the first time.

Let's worship God. We're going to sing to his praise. We're going to sing from Psalm 67. It's the first version of that psalm in the Scottish Psalter. And that's on page 300.

And the tune is Selma. And we sing those familiar words. Lord, bless and pity us. Shine on us with thy face. That the earth, thy way, and nations all may know thy saving grace.

[ 3 : 28 ] Let's join our voices together in the praise of God. Amen. For the earth, thy way, and nations all may know thy saving grace.

Let people praise thee, Lord. Let people all be praised.

Oh, let the nations be glad In songs their voices raise.

Thou just say, people judge On earth, through nations all Let people praise thee, Lord.

Let them praise thee, both great and small In earth, thy fruit shall yield Our God shall bless him stand God shall us bless And shall live thee, unto earth God shall live thee, unto earth We've joined our voices in praise.

[ 5 : 34 ] Let's now unite our hearts in prayer. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for that open invitation And that vast promise given That you will be the blessing to all the nations That as we ask for your blessing upon ourselves We ask that blessing might overflow It might overflow into the lives of our families Into the lives of our communities Into the life of this nation Into the nations of this earth We thank you this morning as we join in worship We join with your church From the north and from the south The east and the west In all nations, in all continents Where the name of the Lord Jesus is exalted And the gospel of the Lord Jesus is heralded So Lord, we pray that you would indeed Be merciful to us You are great and good You are high and holy And you have come down now to our level

You have come down to experience life firsthand So we have in the Lord Jesus A sympathetic high priest Who knows, who sees, who cares Who has walked this way before So we thank you that when we come to you now in prayer You understand You understand the human condition You understand the human frailty You understand the struggles And the trials and the troubles That are characteristic of this life And not only do you understand But you are able You are able to do above and beyond our asking Beyond our imagining Because you, O God, are great in power Great in might Great in holiness and righteousness And Lord, we pray That by faith we may lay hold of you That our trust may be rooted in you In your Son, the Lord Jesus

And that the Holy Spirit himself Might work in such a way That the words that are written on a page Might be words that are imprinted upon our hearts And lived out in our lives We thank you that though we are weak You are strong Though we are often foolish You are altogether wise We are so aware of our inconsistencies And our limitations But you are perfectly consistent And you are limited by nothing And no one So Lord, we thank you That whether from this pulpit In this place Throughout this town Throughout this island Throughout this nation Throughout this world You have promised That you will accompany The proclamation of your word With your presence With your power With your blessing We ask, Lord, that you might exceed Our expectations That you might exceed our asking

And that certainly You might exceed our deserving Because we come to you In that name Which is above every name At the name of Jesus We know that one day Every knee will bow We know that one day Every tongue will confess But until that day comes We bow our knee We confess with our tongue That you are Lord And we want and long to see Many more come to that same Saving knowledge Where they too will bow their knee In glad adoration Where they too will confess With joy The Lord Jesus Christ As their Lord So hear these our prayers And answer us According to Your rich mercy Your infinite resources That are found in Jesus Christ Your Son Our Savior Amen Well, I want to speak To the young people here And I'm sure You have heard this word before I'm sure that your parents

Will have told you That you are precious And maybe parents If you haven't used that word recently Remind your children That they are indeed precious There's a verse That I want to share with you In the Bible From Isaiah This is from Isaiah Chapter 43, verse 4 For those of us older With Bibles Isaiah 43, verse 4 Tells us something Very important But before I tell you About the verse I want to give you An illustration So this ring That is on my finger If I look inside I see a number And that number is 14 And next to the word Number 14 Is a capital K So this tells me That this ring Is 14 carat gold Gold is a precious metal And if I took this If I wanted to If I wanted to sell This ring I could take it To a merchant The merchant would weigh it And would give me cash Based upon the amount Of gold

[ 10 : 37 ] And the amount That this ring weighs But this ring Isn't precious to me Because it's made of gold Let me tell you A little bit about this ring You see this ring Was given twice And inside the ring There are two dates If I can see With my limited vision Now R-E-S Plus D-A 8-20-55 So the 20th of August 1955 Ruth Evelyn Spooner Gave this ring To Dennis Ackroyd Jr.

My mom and dad What is it 44 years later And the other inscription Inside the ring Is H-J Plus R-A 5-24-99 So this ring Was given by my mother To my father And then this ring Was given by my wife To me She put this ring On my finger On the 24th of May 1999 So this ring Is doubly precious To me Not because it's Made of gold But because it was Given in love My mother To my father My wife To me Love You see The Bible Tells us Something very important And young people I want you to hear this Because this is not What I'm saying Nor even is it What your parents Are saying And all that's Very important But God says this About you Because you are Precious in my eyes And honored

And I love you So young people And not so young people God has something That he wants you To know He wants you To know That in his eyes You are Precious Infinitely Valuable You are honored In his sight He loves you You see If you believe that Something remarkable Happens If you believe That God knows you And loves you That you are Precious in your sight In his sight It changes everything Changes how you think Changes how you feel It changes how you live And I want to say I know this is A children's talk But as an adult I'm now 58 I've come to realize That actually God means What he says I should have realized That a long time ago But actually He means That I am precious That I am honored

And that I am loved And he means that For you You are precious You are honored You are loved Sometimes we find it Difficult To take God At his word He doesn't mean me He doesn't mean people Like you know If he really knew Well he does really know But he does say And when you think Today Parents Somehow Say to your children You heard what the preacher Said today I want you to know That you are precious To me Because words matter Words that have Meaning matter And God's word Matters to me God's word Matters to you And no matter How young you are This morning I want you to know Without a shadow Of a doubt That God says You are precious To him You mean so much Because you are So valuable And if you believe that I guarantee you Your life Will be changed By that truth So may God bless To us His word Precious Honored And loved I'm now going to lead us In the Lord's prayer Let's join our voices Our Father Which art in heaven Hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come Thy will be done On earth As it is in heaven Give us this day Our daily bread And forgive us Our debts As we forgive Our debtors And lead us not Into temptation But deliver us From evil For thine is The kingdom The power And the glory Forever and ever Amen Amen Well as we Now turn again To sing to God's praise We're going to sing From Psalm 103 As the young people Will make their way To their Sunday school classes This is page 135

[ 15 : 14 ] Psalm 103 And we're going to sing To the tune Before the throne Praise God my soul With all my heart Let me exalt his holy name Forget not all his benefits His praise My soul In song proclaim Psalm 103 Let's join our voices In praise The Lord forgives To all your sins I'll guilt your sickness And distress Your life he rescues

From the grave And ground you In his tenderness And ground you In his tenderness He's got this fight In his strength From his unending Source of good So God just like The evil strength To youthful maker Is renewed The Lord is known For righteous hands And justice to them God and what?

To Moses he made known his ways, his mighty deeds to Israel's sons, his mighty deeds to Israel's sons.

The Lord is merciful and kind, to anger slow and full of praise.

He will not constantly prove, for in his anger hide his face.

[ 17 : 40 ] It does not punish our misdeeds, or give our sins their just reward.

Our greatest love, as high as heaven, who warms all those who fear the Lord.

Who warms all those who fear the Lord. Let's turn together to read in God's word.

We're going to read from Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah 6 is one of these great commissioning chapters where God is calling and equipping and giving to one of his people a clear message and a clear ministry.

The time frame, if you're interested, as a history person, I like to know dates. We're looking at 738 BC. This is a golden age for Judah.

[ 18 : 47 ] This is a time in which the nation is going well. Military, politics, economics, all seem to be going great.

And in the midst of this, the king dies. The king dies, but the real king still lives and speaks. So let's read together Isaiah chapter 6.

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

Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face. And with two he covered his feet. And with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke.

[ 19 : 54 ] And I said, 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. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.

And he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send and who will go for us?

Then I said, here am I, send me. And he said, go and say to this people, keep on hearing, but do not understand.

Keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull and their eyes heavy. And blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears.

[ 20 : 58 ] And understand with their hearts and turn and be healed. Then I said, how long, O Lord? And he said, until cities lie waste without inhabitant 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.

And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.

Amen. And may God add his own blessing to this reading from his word. We're not going to sing again. We're going to sing from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm number 93.

Psalm 93. And we'll sing to the tune of Stroudwater. You'll find this on page 354, near the back of our psalm books. The Lord doth reign, and clothed is he with majesty most bright.

[ 22 : 07 ] His works do show him clothed to be, and girt about with might. Let's join our voices together to sing to God's praise. The Lord doth reign, and clothed is he with majesty most bright.

His works do show him clothed to be, and girt about with might.

The Lord doth is all so stabbing shed, But yet can not depart.

Thy throne is fixed, of old and found, From everlasting heart.

The bloods, O Lord, have lifted up, They lifted up their voice, The bloods have lifted up their rays, And made a mighty noise, But if the Lord that is on high, is more of might by fire, a noise of many waters is our great sea willow's eye.

[ 24 : 17 ] Thy grace to glory, everyone, in faithfulness excel, and holiness forevermore thy hearts become a thrill.

Whenever I get a chance to visit London, one of the places that I always go is the British Museum. A few years ago they had an exhibition, and it was entitled, Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria, King of the World. Now in the 7th century BC, the Assyrian Empire was a big deal.

And within the Assyrian Empire, Ashurbanipal was a big deal. I don't know about you, but I can go months without thinking about the Assyrian Empire, and years can pass without giving much attention to the emperor, the king, Ashurbanipal.

It reminds us, even as a historian, we forget these great figures of the past. Empires rise and fall. Kings come and go. Presidents and prime ministers fade in the memory.

[ 25 : 49 ] We encounter in Isaiah 6 something different by far. Someone different by far. This is no ordinary king.

This is no ordinary empire. This is no ordinary encounter. And as we see in Isaiah 6, and in a few moments hopefully we'll look into Matthew's gospel, into the New Testament, I think we are reminded of something profound here.

That whatever our vision and understanding of God is, whatever our apprehension, by definition, your view, your God, my God, is far too small.

The God who is, is far greater than any estimation, than any evaluation. Whatever picture we have in our minds, whatever ideas we have in our hearts, is far too small.

There was in the 1950s, a short book was published, which was entitled, Your God is Too Small by J.B. Phillips. And he began that book with this quote, We can hardly expect to escape a sense of futility and frustration until we begin to see what he is like and his purposes are.

[ 27 : 10 ] God will inevitably appear to disappoint the man who is attempting to use him as a convenience, a prop, or a comfort for his own plans.

God has never been known to disappoint the man who is sincerely wanting to cooperate with his own purposes. God is great.

God is great. God is big. He's far bigger, far greater, far more powerful than we can ever imagine. Isaiah encounters the living God in the temple.

As he goes, he sees something that is beyond his comprehension. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

You see, our God is great. Great in power. Great in authority. Great in majesty. Great in glory. Great in holiness. Great in his plans and his purposes.

[ 28 : 18 ] Our great God appears to us here on the pages of scripture to bring a sense of awe and wonder. You see, we're told that when Isaiah went to the temple, that the Lord didn't fill the temple.

It wasn't the robe of the Lord that filled the temple, but it was the train, or in the other translations you have the word hem. You know what a hem is if you have a pair of trousers or a dress.

The hem is just the very bottom of the trouser leg, the very bottom of the dress. It's just a small piece of fabric that just brings the piece of cloth to an end.

It's quite insignificant. And Isaiah is saying, I saw the Lord, and the very hem of his robe filled the temple. Which means that our God is so great, so big, that even the hem fills this magnificent building of the temple.

And he went on to describe how great our God is. That he is a God who is great in holiness, a God who is great in glory, and a God who is great in redemption.

[ 29 : 33 ] We encounter the seraphim, and if you're interested in angels, the only place in the Bible that we read of the seraphim is here.

These angelic servants who are attending God and who are singing this chorus of praise only appear here in scripture.

The angels serve. They are messengers. They are servants. They exist to do the bidding of God. And here they are telling us, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. Now the Lord of hosts is one of many descriptions. And notice that it's the personal name of God, L-O-R-D in capital letters.

Hosts can refer to the heavenly bodies, the stars and the moon and the sun. But most likely what's emphasized here is that the hosts refer to the angelic army.

[ 30 : 41 ] And that God is the commander-in-chief of the armies of heaven. He has the authority to call the angels to do his work, to prosecute his plans, and to achieve his purposes.

So what do we have here? We have a God who is all-powerful, who has all resources, who accomplishes and achieves whatever he plans and purposes.

This is our great God who we encounter today. We encounter him, yes, on the pages of scripture, but we can encounter him personally and powerfully. And when we encounter this God as he is, he never disappoints.

He never discourages. He never lets us down. He's far greater than we ever imagined that he could be. One of the great writers in the history of the church back in the 1700s was a man called John Owen.

John Owen was a man with a big brain. He wrote many volumes of theology. But he admitted, he said, we speak much of God. The truth is we know very little of him.

[ 31 : 51 ] We know so little of God because it is God thus to be known. One of the great theological minds said, actually, we know so little. God is so great and our knowledge is so small.

But what we know fills our hearts with wonder, with awe, and with expectation. So this great God who is the commander-in-chief of the angelic armies, what he says they do, we're told that he is great in holiness.

He is set apart from this world. He is distinct from this world. He is distinct from the ways of this world. He is completely set apart.

And if we are one of his people, we likewise are set apart. A holy God and a holy people go together. Distinct and separate.

Separate from the ways of this world. Separate from the standards of this world. Separate from the spirit of this age. This holy God. And whenever the Bible repeats something, it repeats something for emphasis.

[ 32 : 56 ] It's like how you might, if you're studying and you're reading your textbook and you come across a passage, you might highlight it. You might underline it. You might put a post-it note.

Why? Because this is important to remember. And when God, in his word, repeats, holy, holy, holy, this God is set apart from this world.

He's the creator. We're the creature. He is high and exalted and we are low and humble. But notice that not only is he a holy God, but that this God is glorious.

This world that he has created is filled with his glory. Now, in the Bible, this word glory means a heaviness or a weightiness.

That our God is substantial. He's significant. He's not light. He's not ephemeral. But he is substantial and significant. The holy God.

[ 33 : 55 ] The glory of God. And then almost immediately we see that this holy and glorious God is a God on a mission. And a God who has come to achieve something remarkable.

Because the holy God and the God whose glory fills the whole earth is the God who is involved in redeeming a people. This word redemption is a theme that goes through the whole scripture.

The idea of redemption is payment of a price to set someone free. The Lord Jesus put it so succinctly. He said, whoever sins is a slave to sin.

Sin and slavery go together. That's not how the serpent sold it in Genesis 3. The serpent sold sin as sin brings freedom, but it never does.

The world sells sin. Sin brings satisfaction and happiness. It never does. Our flesh will try to convince us that sin brings some form of fulfillment or joy, but it never does.

[ 35 : 04 ] Sin always brings slavery. But Jesus went on to say, of course, But if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Sin and slavery, Son and freedom. And throughout the scriptures, the children of Israel and Egypt, we hear, after the coming of Jesus, exile, captivity, bondage, slavery, our God is a redeeming God who pays a price to set his people free.

Because the immediate reaction of Isaiah, it's not so much of awe and wonder, but of woe and dread and fear. The foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

I lived in Japan for two years, and I remember one morning waking up, and the whole house was shaking. And I thought, boy, it seems like a train.

It must be rumbling right past the house. It's shaking the house. I didn't know the train line was so close. It wasn't a train. It was an earthquake.

[ 36 : 20 ] And you kind of felt like you were on the open sea, but you were in a building. You were on land. I can't explain the feeling, but you just, it was, once you realized what was happening, it was terrifying.

You know, this idea, everything is now shaking. Everything was shaking in the temple. And you could understand that Isaiah was petrified. He was terrified. What's happening here? And notice his reaction.

And I said, woe is me. I'm in trouble here. You see, when we encounter God as he is, not as we imagine him to be, not as we hope that he might be, but as we encounter the God who is holy and glorious and majestic and large, the natural reaction is, I'm in trouble.

We're in trouble. And he says exactly that. I'm a man of sinful lips. And I live among a people of sinful lips. So what Isaiah is saying, I am in trouble and we are in trouble.

The God who creates and the God who is glorified and the God who is holy, he encounters us. And when he encounters us, we now see ourselves in his light.

[ 37 : 35 ] We now see ourselves in his truth. And we realize that we are not right. He's holy, but we aren't. He's righteous, but we aren't. He's pure, but we are not.

Woe is me. I'm in trouble here. And notice what happens. Just very succinctly. One of the seraphim, remember they're singing that angelic chorus, breaks off, as it were, and flew with a burning coal in his hand to Isaiah.

He had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.

The movement, the direction of travel here is essential. The problem is Isaiah. Isaiah. The problem is the people. But the solution is God's.

You see, I'm very much, as I now teach, I teach at ETS, and I preach occasionally on Sundays. And I'm very much aware that you have to not only be content that what you're saying is correct, and that's very important, but you have to ask yourself as a teacher or as a preacher, what am I saying

and how am I being heard?

[ 38 : 58 ] Because very often I find that when I preach or teach, that people hear things that I'm not saying. And the reason why we hear things that the preacher isn't saying is because we have these thoughts already in our minds.

We have these deep-grained thoughts in our minds. And one of those thoughts is, I need to try harder. I need to do better. I need to fill in the blank.

I need to read the Bible a bit more. I need to pray more regularly. I need to be a better husband. I need to be a better parent. I need to. And you see, so often those thoughts are in our minds.

So even when the Bible says something differently or the preacher says something differently, we just repeat what we know, what we think we know to be true. But we see here in very vivid picture language, the problem is ours, but the solution is God's.

Isaiah isn't able to fix the problem. The only thing that Isaiah can do is identify the problem. We can identify our problem, but we can't fix it. God fixes it.

[ 40 : 09 ] God provides an answer to our problems. God fixes what we have broken. God solves what we cannot solve. So I want you to see it.

Even if we find it difficult to believe, see the image here. The angel takes the coal from the altar. The solution goes from God to the people.

And God provides a way that sin is atoned for, that guilt is taken away. Guilt and sin go together. Guilt and shame go together. The first thing that happened when our first parents sinned was they felt shame. They felt shame because they were guilty.

They disobeyed a clear command. They were told sin will bring freedom. Sin brought guilt and shame and separation.

[ 41 : 08 ] But the gospel undoes the fall. The gospel unravels this consequence of sin so that no longer is there guilt, no longer is there shame, no longer is there separation, but rather a sinful person, a sinful people have now been reconciled to God by God.

It's remarkable. The God who is so great that the very hem of his garment fills the temple. The God who is so great in holiness that his holiness and glory fill the whole earth.

And the God who looks down in mercy and takes the initiative to solve that great problem of human sin, of human guilt, of human separation, of human despair.

This is our God. This is God in his glory. This is God in his greatness. And Isaiah introduces us to this magnificent God. In the 19th century, God raised up some remarkable characters.

He raised up people that went to the ends of the earth with the gospel, like Hudson Taylor went to China. He raised up pulpit ministries like C.H. Spurgeon in London, where he preached to 6,000 people every Sunday morning, every Sunday evening.

[ 42 : 32 ] There were stories told where the Metropolitan Tabernacle was filled, and that there were queues outside the door to come in. Spurgeon said to the congregation, Can I please ask every converted person here to leave, so that your seat might be filled with those who are not yet Christians?

That's remarkable. A remarkable, a 6,000 seat venue was so full that the preacher said, Can I ask those who are already Christians to leave, because there are people outside who are not yet Christians who want to come in?

And the third character that strikes me is D.L. Moody, the American evangelist. He had a fourth grade education. That means at age 10, he left school. He wasn't well educated, but he was eager to learn.

And if you're eager to learn, and you're converted by Christ, watch out. Because this man, without a formal education, became a powerful preacher of the gospel.

He described the gospel in these three, you see, he describes the simple message of the gospel in simple terms. He said, The gospel is three R's.

[ 43 : 45 ] One, we are ruined, ruined by the fall. Two, we are redeemed, we are redeemed by the blood. And three, we are regenerated by the spirit.

Sin brings ruin. But the gospel brings redemption, brings regeneration. And this young man, D.L. Moody, for the next 40 years of his life, he preached Jesus to 100 million people in person.

Not educated, not refined, but he had a passion in the gospel, and he had a vision of how great God was, and how great God is.

So God redeems, and God restores, and God renews. That's the gospel of Jesus. And what we find in Isaiah chapter 6, we find that there's a vivid link between Isaiah 6 and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, the link we see is in Isaiah itself. You'll notice in the first verse we're told, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up.

[ 45 : 01 ] If you move forward in Isaiah to Isaiah chapter 52 and verse 13, the final of the four servant songs, Isaiah 42, Isaiah 49, Isaiah 50, and Isaiah 52, 53, the introduction to the final servant song begins this way.

Behold, my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. The same words that introduce the vision of Isaiah in chapter 6 are the same words that introduce this final song of the servant in 52 and 53.

This same servant who will be crushed. This same servant who will be bruised. This same servant who will be pierced. Pierced for our transgression, bruised for our iniquities.

The chastisement of our peace is upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. So the God who is high and lifted up in that vision in the temple, and the suffering servant who is high and lifted up, but lifted up not on a throne but on a cross, lifted up not to public adoration but to public ridicule and scorn.

And we see this vital link between the vision of Isaiah 6 and the suffering servant of Isaiah 52. And we are reminded that we have an exalted and a risen and an honored Jesus, that he is high, that he is lifted up, that he is powerful, that he is holy, that he is glorious, that he is able.

[ 46 : 51 ] You see, what is seen in picture language in Isaiah 6 is now seen in personal language in Isaiah 52 and 53. The coal taken from the altar, the atonement for sin, the taking away of guilt, is now found in a person.

And that person is Jesus. He is the means by which God redeems and restores and rescues and renews.

So as you read Isaiah 6, you have to read Isaiah 6 along with Isaiah 52 and 53. But I'd like to notice one final connection. And you'll notice on the order of service that the text was from Matthew chapter 9.

Let me just read a few verses from Matthew 9, from verse 18 to 26. While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him saying, my daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and she will live.

Jesus rose and followed him with his disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for 12 years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment.

[ 48 : 17 ] For she said to herself, if I only touch his garment, I will be made well. Jesus turned and seeing her, he said, take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well.

And instantly the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.

And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl, took her by the hand and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district.

I was struck in Isaiah chapter 6 by this vision of the hem of the robe filling the temple. How great God is.

And I was struck in Matthew chapter 9 by this woman who had suffered for so many years that she had the faith simply to touch the hem of the garment of Jesus, just the fringe of his robe.

[ 49 : 25 ] She somehow felt, she somehow knew, she somehow was confident that if she just touched the very edge of his garment, that she could be made whole.

This is how great Jesus is. This is how powerful he is. You see, becoming a follower of Jesus is not the measure of your confidence in him.

Many of us, myself included, our faith is variable. Sometimes it's weak. Sometimes it's strong. Sometimes we can be overwhelmed with doubts.

We can be uncertain. We can be confused. So you see, for me, being a follower of Jesus is not the strength of my faith, not the strength of my commitment, not the depth of my understanding.

But my identity as a follower of Jesus is based upon the strength of his commitment, based upon the strength of his power, based upon who he is and what he can do.

[ 50 : 33 ] Because this woman touches the very fringe, and she's made whole. How is that possible? How can just a simple touch heal one who had suffered for so long?

How can a simple act of faith transform the human heart, change the human mind, change the very direction? I don't know how that's possible, but I know it is possible.

I don't know how he does it. But just as this woman who reached out in faith, because that's the key, Jesus identified her faith. She had enough faith to touch the hem.

She had enough knowledge to reach out. So this morning, it's not how much you know. It's not how strong your faith is, but who is the object of your faith?

Where do you find your confidence lying? Is your confidence in yourself, how much you understand, how much you've been able to do, or is your confidence in the one who can make you whole, who can make you clean, who can fix what you have broken, who can restore what you have lost?

[ 51 : 48 ] Even if your faith is so small like the woman's, and you feel like I can just barely touch the hem of his garment. The moment she touched, she was made whole.

And when we reach out in faith to Jesus, with the weakest, with the most limited understanding, watch what he can do.

Watch his power, his authority, his capacity, his ability. And I want you to know that we have a strong savior this morning. Our faith might be weak, but his power is strong.

Our commitment might be variable, but his commitment is persistent, personal, and he will bring his people home. He has the ability not only to forgive us, but he has the ability to strengthen us along the way, and to make sure that not one of us is lost.

I mentioned the connection between Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 52. In each of the four gospels, the commissioning of Isaiah 6 is mentioned at one point or another.

[ 52 : 58 ] In each of the four gospels, the final servant song of Isaiah is quoted. And I think what we are told there is that the vision of the exalted Lord in the temple and the vision of the suffering servant is found nowhere else than in the person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew wants us to know that. Mark wants us to realize. Luke wants us to know. And John wants to make it crystal clear that the Lord who is high and exalted is the same Jesus who is lifted upon the cross so that all men, women, boys, girls might see, might perceive, and might respond to him.

Our God is so great. Our gospel is so great because our Savior is so great. He's great in power. He's great in authority.

He's great in love. He's great in mercy. And even if you feel, I can but touch that hem of his garment. My faith is so weak. My life is so inconsistent.

And yet, if your faith rests upon him, he is consistent. He is powerful. He is committed. If you like music, if you like classical music, one of my favorite pieces is the Hallelujah Chorus.

[ 54 : 20 ] And the Hallelujah Chorus, one of the great verses that is quoted from Revelation, says, The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

And he shall reign forever and ever. All the ancient emperors, all the ancient kings have faded into obscurity. But our king, our Lord, lives and rules and reigns today.

He will reign forever and ever. He is king of kings. He is lord of lords. He is all-powerful. He is all-present. He is all-merciful.

He is all-loving. So how big is your God? How big is your Savior? Is he big enough to take your sin away? Is he powerful enough to renew your heart?

The Bible says yes. He's big enough. He's powerful enough. He's gracious enough. He's able and he's willing. I've worked for many years, as Murdo said.

[ 55 : 22 ] I've been in and out of prison for the last 25 years. I remember one. We used to have young offenders under 21s at Edinburgh Prison. And I remember this boy.

I mean, he must have been. He was 16, but he looked like he was 12. You know, came up to hear on me. And one of the jobs that we, one of our responsibilities as chaplains is to introduce ourselves to new admissions.

And you could tell this guy had never been in jail before. He just was stunned. And I introduced myself and I said, I'm one of the chaplains. Is there anything I can do to help you? And he said, yes, there is.

Can you take me home? And I said, I can't do that. You see, I wanted to help him, but there was so, but I couldn't do that. I couldn't say, right, well, I'll just take you back to your house.

I'll just take you back to your mom, take you back to your family. But I couldn't do that. You see, we have in Jesus a Savior who is willing to help and able to help.

[ 56 : 22 ] He has all power, all authority, all wisdom, and all grace, and he's willing to help you. He's willing to forgive and able to forgive. He's willing to transform.

He's able to transform. That's how great he is and that's how good he is. I mentioned that quotation from J.B. Phillips, and I'm reminded of, at the end of that book, he put it this way.

He said, many people have a vague, childish affection for a half-remembered Jesus, but they've never used their adult critical faculties on this matter at all.

They hardly seem to the paramount importance of his claim to be God. Yet if for one moment we imagine the claim to be true, the mind almost reels at its significance.

The Jesus who walked past this woman and she reached out and touched, he is God in the flesh with all authority, with all power, with all honor, with all glory, with all holiness.

[ 57 : 28 ] God has come down. He's come down on a mission. He's come to seek. He's come to save. He's come to bring us so that we might go from where we are to where he is.

your God is too small and so is mine. Your Savior is too small and so is mine. But we encounter a great Savior with great power, with great affection, with great capacity.

And even though our faith is so small, when you have a small faith in a great Savior, watch out.

Watch out for what he can do in your life. Watch out for what he can do through your life.

Watch out for what he can do in the life of this congregation, in the life of this town, because he is that big. He is that great. He is that gracious.

And he is that merciful. I saw the Lord high and lifted up and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Let's pray.

[ 58 : 32 ] Father in heaven, I thank you for each one of us gathered here. Lord, we recognize that we are weak. We recognize that we have sinned. We recognize that we are a people of unclean lips and that we are in desperate need of your grace, of your strength, of your wisdom.

Father, we come to you in humility, but we come to the one who is high and exalted. We come to you in weakness, but we come to the one who is strong. And I pray that you might give to us that faith of that woman who had suffered so long.

one day, the same as the next, one month, one year, time after time. And for many of us, life is hard. Help us to reach out in faith to Jesus.

And for those of us who have been walking the path, remind us that we need him as much today as we ever have. We continue to need his grace. We continue to need his strength.

We continue to need his love. We continue to need his mercy. But we thank you that we have a Savior who is great in power, great in love, who is both able and willing.

[ 59 : 43 ] And our prayer is in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to sing our final item of praise, which is Psalm 124.

That's from the Sing Psalms version. And we're going to sing to the tune Old 124th. So Psalm 124. we'll sing these words to God's praise.

If God the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say, had not the Lord been near when foes attacked us, filling us with fear. Let's join our voices in God's praise.

Please. When the wrath against us reached its height, Our ivory had been swallowed in their spite.

We would have been enveloped by the flood, O mallets and torrents would have gone, The waters would have carried us along, But praise the Lord, for he has set us free, And has long left us to their cruelty.

[ 61 : 45 ] We have escaped just as our captured bird, Out of the snare met us being set free.

The snare is come, we are of liberty, Our help is in the name of God the Lord, To reveal the earth and heavens by this word.

Let us pray. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Rest upon, abide with us this day and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.

[ 63 : 27 ]