

Holy, Holy, Holy

Bible Background • ISAIAH 6:1–12

Printed Text • ISAIAH 6:1–8 | Devotional Reading • JOSHUA 24:14–24

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **RECOGNIZE** that God is worthy of praise and worship; **TRUST** God, who is worthy of praise and worship; and **COMMIT** to worship God in spirit and in truth.

In Focus

After a long day at the office, Warren was drained from marathon meetings on what to do about the company's drop in sales. No solid ideas had come about and even more meetings were going to be needed in the future. Warren and his wife, Deloris, asked the Lord for insight on how he could best help his company solve its financial woes. In the midst of this prayer, he and Deloris worshiped God and voiced their complete trust in the Lord to see his company through this tough time as He had so many times before.

That night, Warren got up out of the bed, fell prostrate on the floor, and covered his face. He felt the Lord's presence. The Lord gave Warren ideas on how to solve his company's problem for God's glory. Warren awoke from the dream, recognized that God had given him an extraordinary opportunity, and wrote down everything the Spirit of the Lord told him to do. Warren met with his director to share with him the insight given from the Lord. Warren's director asked how he knew these things; Warren praised God for giving him the insight to solve the problem.

In today's lesson, we will study the prophet Isaiah's encounter with the holiness of God and his uncommon call.

Keep in Mind

“And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 6:1** 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.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

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

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

5 Then said I, Woe is me! for 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.

6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:

7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

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.

The People, Places, and Times

Isaiah. He was the son of Amoz and a prophet of the southern kingdom of Judah who lived in the 8th century B.C. Isaiah lived and ministered in Jerusalem for 58 years. He prophesied during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Although the Bible does not record the tribe from which Isaiah is descended, Jewish tradition suggests that Isaiah may have been related to Judah's royal family. This would explain why Isaiah enjoyed relatively easy access to the kings of Judah.

Isaiah is believed to have been the author of the biographies of King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:22) and King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:32). At God's direction, Isaiah humbled himself and went about for three years "naked and barefoot" (Isaiah 20). No other prophet predicted the birth of the Messiah, Christ Jesus, to the extent Isaiah did. He also prophesied extensively about the ministry and the sufferings of the Messiah for the sins of humanity. While it is not certain exactly how Isaiah died, a pseudo-epigraphical work—meaning a piece falsely attributed to a biblical character—called "the Ascension of

Isaiah," states that he was sawed in two with a wooden saw during the reign of Manasseh.

Background

Eighth century B.C. was a tumultuous time for the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. This period saw the rise of four major prophets: Amos and Hosea in Israel and Isaiah and Micah in Judah. According to Isaiah 6:1 (NLT), Isaiah received his call in about 742 B.C., "the year King Uzziah died." King Uzziah, also known as Azariah, began his long reign in 783 B.C. In about 750 B.C., Jotham, his son, was made co-regent. After the death of his father, Jotham reigned seven more years. When Isaiah began his ministry, Menahem was king of Israel. Menahem was the fourth king in less than one year. Jeroboam II's death in 746, after 40 years on the throne, was followed by six kings, leading to the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. to the Assyrians. In the southern kingdom, Jotham succeeded Ahaz and then came Hezekiah. This age was marked by the rise of Assyria to become the dominant power in the Near East. Tiglath-Pileser III ascended the throne in 745 B.C. and ruled until

727 B.C. In his second year in power, shortly before Isaiah began his ministry, he marched his army westward and occupied Israel.

As a vassal state, Israel was expected to make regular payments to the Assyrians. After a reign of 10 years, King Menahem's son, Pekahiah, succeeded him. The next year, the Assyrian king, Tigleth-Pileser, sent his army into Palestine. Syria and Israel invaded Judah in 733 B.C. This was called the Syro-Ephramite War. Although many were killed, including the son of the king, these armies were unable to invade the capital city of Jerusalem. Rather than rely on God, King Ahaz foolishly sent a tribute of gold and silver to Tiglath-Pileser III and asked for his assistance. The Assyrians defeated the Syrian and northern kingdom's armies but very quickly Judah became a vassal state of Assyria. The combination of exile and resettlement of foreign peoples in Israel and Judah led to the creation of the people known as the Samaritans of the New Testament.

At-A-Glance

1. True Worship Recognizes God's Holiness (Isaiah 6:1-4)
2. True Worship Acknowledges Sinfulness (v. 5)
3. True Worship Receives God's Grace (vv. 6-7)
4. True Worship Responds to God's Call (v. 8)

In Depth

1. True Worship Recognizes God's Holiness (Isaiah 6:1-4)

As Isaiah began the narrative of his ministerial calling, he set the date as "in the year that king Uzziah died" (6:1). The death of King Uzziah serves as a time reference for Isaiah's vision by giving the historical context.

According to Isaiah, although his body is inside the Temple, his soul is taken up to heaven, and there he saw a magnificent vision of God and the heavenly host. Isaiah recounts seeing the Lord Himself, seated upon a throne. Here we see God's throne as the representation of God's supreme authority and power. Isaiah describes God's position as "high and lifted up." We should understand this to mean that God has no equal. He alone is the Supreme Being. Notice that the God Isaiah is viewing is neither remote nor obscure. Because Isaiah sees beyond the realm of the visible, he is able to view a God who is both majestic and wonderful. If God is to occupy the center of our lives, we, too, must not view Him as distant or mysterious. God is concerned in the affairs of humankind, especially those of His chosen people.

Isaiah continued his description of God's majesty by reporting that the robes of the Lord are so massive that the "train," or the hem of His robe, filled the entire Temple. This majesty of God is shown in the behavior of the heavenly hosts. These six-winged creatures are seraphs or seraphim. Using two of their six wings, the seraphs cover their faces in reverence for God, recognizing that they are unworthy to look upon Him directly. Hiding one's face from God in reverence and in fear was also shown in the actions of Abraham, who fell on his face before the Lord (Genesis 17:3); in Moses, who hid his face from God (Exodus 3:6); and also with the prophet Elijah, who wrapped his face with his mantle (1 Kings 19:13). When Peter realized that Jesus was the Messiah, he fell to the ground and asked Jesus to go away and not look on his unworthiness (Luke 5:8).

The seraphim use another pair of their wings to cover their feet as they bow down in honor before God. This action symbolizes that their authority is derived not from them but from the God they worship. The seraphim use two wings to fly, showing that they are in constant service

to God. The holiness the angels recognize, in the presence of God, is reflected in their continuous praise: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3). The use of the word “holy” three times perhaps signifies their recognition of the plurality of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah further reported on the effectiveness of God. As the seraphs cried “holy,” the doorposts of the Temple shook and the Temple became filled with the glory of God. As creatures created for the glory of God, how much more ought we to recognize His majesty and strive to serve Him in reverence and humility?

2. True Worship Acknowledges Sinfulness (v. 5)

God’s majesty and splendor serve to point out humankind’s helplessness and unworthiness. It is this realization that prompted Isaiah’s response when he witnessed the tremendous heavenly scene: “Then said I, Woe is me! for 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” (v. 5). We have to admire Isaiah’s honesty. Isaiah received a glimpse of the power and presence of God and in doing so recognized (Isaiah’s) sinfulness by openly confessing it to God.

The symbolic use of the “lips” or mouth to reveal what is in our hearts is used frequently in Scripture. Jesus tells the Pharisees, “Out of the fullness ... of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34, AMP). Isaiah’s reference to “unclean lips” may mean that his sense of unworthiness stemmed from something he may have said or perhaps something he should have said. He also refers to living among “people of unclean lips.” Notice that as Isaiah viewed the majesty of God, his immediate reaction was to view himself and those around him in a new light.

3. True Worship Receives God’s Grace (vv. 6–7)

In response to God’s awesome presence, Isaiah humbled himself in worship and confessed his sinfulness before God’s holiness. God’s response to Isaiah’s confession was immediate. He dispatched one of the seraphim to take a burning hot coal and touch Isaiah’s lips. Note that the hot coal was removed from the brazen altar where the sacrifices were offered. This symbolizes redemption, or the price paid to obtain forgiveness. The seraph told Isaiah, “Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged” (Isaiah 6:7). This action is symbolic of God’s cleansing and His forgiveness. We should note that God did not chastise Isaiah. Rather, God, in response to Isaiah’s humility, immediately reacted to Isaiah’s need. God cleansed, forgave, and equipped Isaiah. We should be reminded how deeply God loves us and wants to be reconciled to us, His most beloved creation.

We should ask ourselves whether there are areas in our lives that need God’s cleansing. If so, we must be willing to allow Him. Many times, these areas are secret. Our family and friends may be unaware that we struggle in these areas. Only God is able to reach in and cleanse us from all the unrighteousness we have hidden from others.

The live coal placed in Isaiah’s mouth must have been excruciatingly painful. This reminds us that God’s cleansing may entail discomfort or pain. But that can’t deter us from our willingness to let God into those areas that need cleansing. Are you willing to allow Him into those places that really need His touch—those places that you would rather no one know about? Are you willing to let Him take that burning coal and touch your lips with it? There is no getting around the fact that the cleansing God wants to do in our lives is hard—really hard at times—and that the process can be difficult. Despite

how much it may hurt, our usefulness to God is dependent on our willingness to allow Him to cleanse and forgive us. Our call or commission from God follows His cleansing and forgiveness.

4. True Worship Responds to God's Call (v. 8)

Isaiah was being commissioned to be an instrument of God's mercy, grace, and God's prophetic words. Isaiah's response was swift and certain: "Here am I. Send me!" He told the Lord that he was ready to go wherever God wanted him to go, and he was prepared to do whatever God wanted him to do. As an act of worship, Isaiah made this commitment without even knowing what God would ask him to do. Isaiah's commitment to serve God was so sincere that he was willing to go before he knew where he would have to go!

This should make us examine our response to God's call. Our lifestyle should be an act of worship unto the Lord in response to His goodness.

How often are we quick to respond, "Use me"? Or are we fearful and reluctant? Saying "Send me" to God means giving up control of our lives. Our wishes and desires will no longer be our priority. His will and His word will be all that matters. This loss of control is frightening only if we forget that the benefits are God's blessings.

Search the Scriptures

Fill in the blanks.

1. "In the year that _____ died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1).

2. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of _____ lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of _____ lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (v. 5).

3. "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Then said I, _____; send me" (v. 8).

Discuss the Meaning

1. Read Joshua 5:13–15. How does Joshua's encounter with the "captain of the host of the LORD" (v. 14) compare with Isaiah's vision of God and encounter with the heavenly hosts? How are the two encounters similar? In what ways do they differ?

2. The angels Isaiah saw were crying, "Holy, holy, holy." Discuss the impact that this vision of worship should have on our corporate worship.

Liberating Lesson

It is only when we have a proper vision of the majesty of God and His holiness that we will come to understand just how sinful and unworthy we are. Without a clear recognition of the awe of God, we may wrongly believe that we have something to boast about. Our celebrity-obsessed society can tempt us to think that boasting is a virtue and that we should strive to exalt ourselves and draw admiration from others for our appearance or achievements, real or imagined. It is only after we truly encounter God that we will see ourselves clearly and know the full measure of our unrighteousness. Only God through His Son Jesus Christ can cleanse and forgive us of our sins so we can enter into His presence and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Application for Activation

No matter where we are (at home, in the car, at work, school, or church), we are able to set the atmosphere for worship and honor the presence of God through our praise. As the church of Jesus Christ, we have to be change agents to help the world recognize the holiness of God and how our sinfulness blocks our view of Him. However, all is not lost, because through the blood of Jesus, we can be reconciled to communion with Him.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Biblical Words – Pronunciation Guide. <http://netministries.org/Bbasics/bwords.htm/> (accessed January 7, 2012).
Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon. <http://www.BibleStudyTools.com/lexicons/Hebrew/kjv/> (accessed January 5, 2012).
Packer, J. I., Merrill C. Tenney, and William White, Jr., eds. *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997, 1980.

Say It Correctly

Uzziah. yoo-ZAI-uh.
Seraphim. SEHR-uh-fihm.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Setting Yourself to Seek God
(2 Chronicles 26:1–5)

TUESDAY

From Success to Pride to Destruction
(2 Chronicles 26:16–21)

WEDNESDAY

Following a Father’s Example
(2 Kings 15:32–38)

THURSDAY

People Dulled to God’s Presence
(Isaiah 6:9–13)

FRIDAY

Choosing to Serve a Holy God
(Joshua 24:14–24)

SATURDAY

Seeking the Face of God
(Psalm 24)

SUNDAY

Encountering the Holy God
(Isaiah 6:1–8)

Notes
