

# Isaiah 6

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it'd be great if you could have your Bibles open at Isaiah chapter 6. And as you're turning there, let me just say thank you for having me today. It's been a real joy to be with you and to be able to preach and see your faces.

And we will be praying for you in London City Presbyterian Church. We are so thankful for our partnership in the gospel, for the connections that we have with this congregation. And we're so glad that we are in this together.

And it's been a real joy just to worship with brothers and sisters in Christ in London. Especially for me. So thank you for today. Well, I want to get going this evening with a question.

And the question is this. Can you remember the last time you were awestruck at something in life? When was the last time something caused your jaw to drop, your eyes to pop out your head? When was the last time you gasped in amazement? Or you were stunned into silence at something you beheld? The last time I was left awestruck happened just last year.

[ 1 : 01 ] It was a Sunday evening. I had just finished preaching in London City Pres. And along with three other friends from the congregation, we decided that we would go and join the really, really, really long queue to see the Queen lying in state at Westminster Hall.

We rushed out of church, sprinted across Tower Bridge, and we managed to find the back of the queue. And we were among the last to join before the queue closed. It was 7 p.m. And we queued for nine and a half long hours.

And then at 4.30 a.m. on Monday morning, we wearily wandered in to Westminster Hall. And I suspect some of you may have done the same.

But as for as long as I live, and I'm no diehard royalist in that sense, but as for as long as I live, I will never forget the scene that greeted us that morning.

We walked into this room, pregnant with ancient history. And there in the middle of it was the longest reigning monarch of Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

[ 2 : 13 ] A coffin just seven foot. But there was something that left me awestruck. When you had to fall past it, you had to look up.

She was raised in a plinth, and there was the royal standard. There was the imperial crown with its 3,000 diamonds, with its 300 perils, with its emeralds and rubies just glistening, dazzling, mesmerizing.

There was a scepter and the orb propped up on top of the coffin. I just can't put it into words, but it will be for me one of the most memorable experiences I've ever had.

And I had to remind myself, Andy, this is just a dead monarch. But even still, as I stood in front of a coffin with the remains of our late queen, I couldn't but stand in awe and respect.

We'll contrast that with the prophet Isaiah's experience when he wandered into the temple, and he was given a glimpse, not of a dead monarch, but of a living, the living and glorious king of glory.

[ 3 : 35 ] Tonight, I want us, my prayer for us is that we would be left awestruck at the sight of the glory of God. That tonight we would be stunned into silence at the grace of God.

That we would gasp in amazement as our glorious king invites us into service of Him. Let's just pray and ask for God's help as we come to this passage.

God, we pray that you would open up our eyes as we've opened up your word. We pray that you would turn up the volume of the Holy Spirit speaking tonight. We pray that as we come to behold you afresh in your word, that we would see you for who you are.

And that as we leave here this evening, we would leave transformed as a result of this life-changing vision. We pray this in your son's glorious and precious name.

Amen. What we have in Isaiah chapter 6 is the occasion when Israel's young, pious prophet went up to the temple to worship God, but he did not come back out the same way he went in.

[ 5 : 05 ] There in the temple, Isaiah had a life-transforming vision of who God is. And we've got four points we're going to consider this text with. God, because Isaiah receives a vision of who God is.

Guilt, because in light of who God is he becomes overcome with his sinfulness and guilt. Grace, because there in the presence of God he experiences the amazing forgiveness that God offers. And finally, gratitude, because Isaiah responds with a heart filled with thankfulness. God, guilt, grace, gratitude.

Verse 1. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.

Isaiah's opening statement dates this experience to 740 BC. It also informs us that he had this vision at a timely moment in his own personal life as a prophet and for the nation as a whole.

[ 6 : 09 ] 2022 will go down in the history books as the end of the second Elizabethan age. It will go down in the history books as the end of an era.

It will go down in the history books because it will probably be the last time there will be such widespread mourning in our nation over one individual.

You can well imagine that the day when Isaiah walked up to the temple, that sad situation that had overcome the nation of Israel, the passing of King Uzziah, overwhelmed him and burdened him. He was God's prophet for the people. King Uzziah, just like our late queen, had been one of the longest reigning monarchs of Israel.

52 years. For most of his reign, it was a time of peace and prosperity. It was the end of an age.

[ 7 : 12 ] And so picture Isaiah walking up to the temple with a heavy heart, but don't you just love God's timing when Israel's throne was vacant, God gave Isaiah a vision of heaven's throne occupied.

When everything fell out of control in the nation, God gave Isaiah a vision of the one who was in complete control. The one who was gloriously working his purposes out for his people.

I don't know what's going on in your personal life. I don't know what's going on in this congregation's life. I do know what's going on in the world from what we read in the headlines, but our world feels out of control. And so maybe it's a timely vision for us, it's a timely moment for us to get a fresh vision of who God is.

The first thing that Isaiah saw, we read in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.

Note God's position to reflect the fact that He is the preeminent one, the supreme one, the most high one, the exalted one. When you went to see the queen lying in state, our coffin, they had really raised her up in a plinth, so you really had to look up.

[ 8 : 30 ] It was befitting. She was worthy of honor. She was worthy of our respect. But here, we can only wonder how high Isaiah had to lift his head.

because he saw the one who sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, the most high, the one above all powers, all authorities, all dominions.

I don't know about you, but for myself, one of the problems I suffer from is spiritual amnesia.

Constantly forgetting how glorious God is.

I suffer from this problem that when I forget who He is, I'm tempted to reduce Him down to a size where I'm comfortable with Him, where I try and fit Him into my life instead of realizing that my life fits into His purposes.

I need to be reminded of just how great and glorious God is, and that is where this vision begins.

Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne high and lifted up.

[ 9 : 41 ] And then he goes on and he says he saw the train of His robe and it filled the temple. For the young ones, you might be studying history at school, you might remember that in history that we're taught about the ancient kings, whether it's in Babylon, Mesopotamia, that the greatness of a king would be reflected, demonstrated, showcased in the length of the train of His robe.

The greater a king, the longer the robe. The more victories he had over his opposing kingdoms, the more they would increase the size of his robe. Well, here's Isaiah.

He catches a glimpse of God and we read that he saw that the train of His robe filled the temple. In the Hebrew, the idea is he saw the hem of His garment, just the outer edge.

And it filled the temple. And the point is how overwhelming God is in His greatness.

How much more there was to God that Isaiah couldn't see. He just saw the very edge, but it filled the temple. God's far more glorious and greater than you and I have ever dared to imagine.

[10:56] vision. We need our eyes open to this sheer overwhelming vision of who God is. Again, I don't know about you, but in my spiritual life, whether it's I wake up in the morning and I check the headlines on my phone, or whether I just wake up with all the worries of the day or the week ahead, I can find that they fill the vision of my mind and heart.

And the one who should loom the largest in my mind and heart doesn't. Well, here Isaiah's vision of who God is calls us afresh to see that God ought to loom large in our minds, hearts, and souls because He truly is far greater than we've ever dared to imagine.

Now, Isaiah's vision of who God is deepens with what happens next because He gets a glimpse of these creatures called seraphim. The only time we ever read about these creatures is here.

In the Hebrew, the word seraphim at its root literally means to burn. These are burning, fiery creatures created by God to dwell in the holy presence of God.

We're told about these seraphim they've got six wings. With two, they covered their feet. With two, they flew. And with two, they covered their face. Think about this. These creatures created by God holy and sinless to live in His presence have to cover their face.

[12:24] Such is the dazzling intensity of the beauty of God's holiness. With two, they cover their feet.

Such is their awareness that in the presence of God, they are on holy ground and they are unworthy to be in His presence. With two, they flew.

Such is their awareness that they were created by God to do His bidding at any moment to be His heavenly messengers, to carry out His will.

You know, when you're young, your parents tell you, don't look at the sun. You can't look at the sun. These holy creatures made to live in God's presence, made to do God's bidding, could not look in the face of their maker and king. strange, but when I was looking at the Queen's Coughing with the Imperial Crown, it was mesmerizing, but you know when something's overwhelming in its beauty and its power, it's dazzling, you can't linger long.

[13:46] You have to look away. The posture of these seraphim is significant because in just a moment we're going to see their posture reflected in Isaiah.

So get this, as we think of the Lord high and lifted up, the train of His robe filling the temple, we've got these seraphim who surround them, who shield their faces, who are ready to serve, but then notice that we are told that in verse 3, one called to another and said, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the Lord of angel armies, the whole earth is full of His glory.

These angels sing to one another about the extraordinary nature of God. And they sing in antiphonal praise. One says, Holy, another one says, Holy back, another one says, Holy back, the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of His glory. It's the only time in the Bible, here in Isaiah and then in Revelation, that we read of any of God's attributes repeated three times and it's His holiness. It is a supersuperlative. In Hebrew, you want to make a point, you'll say something is the best of the best, you'll say King of kings or Lord of lords or songs of songs.

[15:04] You repeat something three times and it's in a category altogether of its own. It is set apart, it is separate, it is the purpose of saying that God is holy, He is in a class all of His own.

I don't know what you think of when you think of the holiness of God but listen to A.W. Tozer. We cannot grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we're capable of.

God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered, it stands apart, unique, unapproached, incomprehensible and unattainable.

The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God's power, admire God's wisdom but His holiness he cannot even begin to imagine.

God's holiness is truly extraordinary. You know what else it is? It's also truly thrilling. these fiery creatures burned to the very bottom of their being in delightful praise of God in all of His holiness.

[16:27] We sing about what we delight in. We sing love songs because we love love and lovers. We sing about our favorite football teams. Here these angels sing about their glorious God because they delight in Him.

I want you to notice that in response to the singing of God's holiness we read in verse 4 and the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him who called and the house was filled with smoke.

Anytime you read about God being worshipped in the splendor of His holiness like in Psalm 96 you'll read that the nations tremble, the earth shakes. Brothers and sisters as we catch a glimpse of God and His holiness in this vision we should be shaken to the core of our being.

Let me be really honest with you. My life is marked by callous worship careless living compromised godliness and casualness in my Christianity and passivity in my service when I have lost sight of God and His holiness.

Amen. And so as we enter the temple as it were and see this vision we're being called back to who God is.

[ 17 : 47 ] Now our first point is the longest point. Isaiah gets this vision of who God is. Well now we come to our second point. After seeing God for who He is Isaiah comes to see himself for who He is.

There's no coincidence that John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion is split into two books. knowledge of God and knowledge of self. When you get a knowledge of who God is you will come to a true discovery of who you are.

I don't know if any of you like watching crime scene crime dramas you know CSI NCIS you know you know those moments when you're watching them and there's a crime scene but they go into it's a home or it's a bit of a car and they open it up and it just looks pristine clean perfect and then they turn off the lights and then they put up their UV lights their ultraviolet lights and they turn them on and this room that you thought was perfectly clean is revealed under the ultraviolet lights to be filthy and dirty there's blood everywhere there's bodily fluids here there and everywhere there's fingerprints it's a crime scene.

Well here's Isaiah this young pious prophet he comes into the presence of God and under the x-ray gaze of God he has exposed to him his sinfulness you know one of the things that can happen we come to church right and some of us dress up we put on our Sunday best we give the impression to those around us that we're good we're doing well and yet if you want to be exposed for who you truly are just come into the presence of God it's here we discover our true sinfulness remember what was Isaiah's calling as a prophet he was given the task to speak the word of God to the people of God what is it he becomes overcome with verse 5 woe is me for I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips this is a man whose calling is to preach the word of God and he realizes that under the x-ray gaze of God his mouth is filthy he is disgusting he's dirty he's guilty he dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips maybe there's that connection that out of the overflow of our hearts what's truly in our hearts it manifests in our mouths as Jesus said notice why he is so overcome with his guilt for my eyes have seen the king the lord of hosts you know one thing that I think contributed to my me being awestruck in the presence of the of the queen in Westminster Hall is I probably had never been that close to someone in human terms was that great

I realized that there was a distinction between me and her everything she had guards protecting her coffin the flag the crown the scepter the orb all of it she's in a different category in that sense and that is what overcomes Isaiah this sense that he's in the presence of his king he is the created and this one is his creator and what he becomes most conscious of that he confesses in God's presence is his filthiness his uncleanness he feels so utterly exposed before the blazing holiness of the Lord but here's the wonderful thing our God reveals himself and reveals Isaiah to himself not because he wants to condemn him or destroy him but because he wants to redeem him

[ 21 : 58 ] God guilt grace then one of the seraphs 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 your sin atoned for here we see the gospel of grace in this passage and you need to see it this is a case of open heart surgery and you need to see it's God who takes his initiative the medicine is taken from the altar the place of sacrifice without the without a sacrifice without the shedding of blood we know from the Old Testament there can be no forgiveness of sin it comes from an altar that's on fire that's got burning coals on it which is a picture of God's holy wrath against sin and this seraphim flies to

Isaiah and he touches his lips with his burning coal and instead of him being destroyed he's cleansed you want to hear a better gospel verse in all the Bible than what the angel said behold this has touched your lips your guilt is taken away your sin is atoned for this is the gospel in high

definition salvation God in salvation comes to take away our guilt and to atone for our sin and the altar is the cross but do you want to know the thing that should stun you and I into silence the vision that Isaiah has of God sitting on his throne high and lifted up the train of his robe filling the temple the seraphim singing holy holy holy holy is the Lord God of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory do you know that that vision is the vision of the pre-incarnate glory of Jesus

Christ for in John's gospel John says Isaiah said these things when he spoke of Christ's glory the one who sat on the throne who was worshipped and adored by the angels is the same one who came into the sin sick world and hung on the cross the altar of sacrifice shed his blood so that sinners like you and me could be cleansed our guilt taken away our sin atoned for the thing that should stun us into silence is this is all for you and me our king coming to save and rescue us there were many stories after the queen's passing of how she there were moments in her life where she kind of stepped out of her role and did some incredible things for some people none of them come close to this none of them our glorious king the king of angel armies the creator of this universe stepped off his throne and came to die in our place to shed his blood so that we could be forgiven the birth place of hope is the self sacrificial love of

God and now we come to the final point what is the response and it's nothing but gratitude on Isaiah's part but I don't want you to miss this the first time when God speaks is in verse 8 the first time that Isaiah hears his king is in verse 8 and I heard the voice of the Lord saying whom shall I send and who will go for us the same God who's in the business of cleansing unclean filthy sinners redeeming them by amazing grace is the same God who seeks to enlist them in his glorious service you know it's such a thought that should cause us to gasp in amazement God has angels that are perfect that can do his bidding and yet he chooses to use unclean sinners saved by grace to be his servants he chooses to use people like you and

I to be his envoy his ambassadors to make him known in this world and it is because of gratitude in Isaiah's mind and heart that he responds with those glorious words here I am send me John Calvin says disregarding Isaiah's response this shows how great is the cheerfulness that springs from faith it's interesting Isaiah didn't need to be coerced into service Isaiah was just overwhelmed that his king who loved him who showed him such grace who cleansed him would want to use him and here am I send me use me and brothers and sisters our response to understanding to catching a glimpse tonight and understanding something of the grace of God tonight should be to want to go and serve him as he calls us you know I said there's something of the angels posture in

[ 27 : 44 ] Isaiah they covered their feet because they realized they were unworthy they had wings that could fly because they realized they would go at God's bidding whenever he called they covered their face because they knew they couldn't behold the dazzling intensity of the beauty of holiness well here's something that is completely different when he comes again when we lay down our crowns at his feet at the last we will see him as he is and in the twinkling of an eye we will be made just like him such is the amazing grace of God that he has made us saved us uses us in his service and then will give us the incredible privilege of beholding him face to face that my friends is grace upon grace this story as I close wasn't told of Queen

Elizabeth it was told of Queen Victoria it appeared in a London newspaper many years ago the conclusion of a sermon that she heard she approached the preacher and said oh how I wish the Lord might come during my lifetime when the preacher asked her what her desire was based on she replied I should like to lay my crown at his feet and when at the end he comes brothers and sisters we will be given a crown of glory and I should like to lay mine down at his feet the King of Kings the God of Gods worthy of all our praise let's bow our heads and pray to those those those! those! those! those!