

Our Holy God Isaiah 6:1-8

A generation ago, J. B. Phillips wrote a book called “Your God is Too Small”. The title says it all. So many of us struggle because our God is much smaller than the God of the Bible. We have him neatly defined and kept in a box of our own making.

If your God is too small, perhaps you need to take another look at the God of the Bible. Over the centuries theologians have used certain words to describe His essence: Sovereign, Almighty, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Infinite, Eternal, and Immortal, to mention only a few. But no list of adjectives could ever adequately picture the immenseness of God. He is so big that we don’t even have the proper words to describe his bigness. He is bigger than our biggest words and grander than our grandest conceptions. Because he is God, no words or thoughts of mortal men and women could ever compass his greatness. He is far bigger than we imagine, his presence fills the universe, he is more powerful than we know, wiser than all the wisdom of the wisest men and women, his love is beyond human understanding, his grace has no limits, his holiness is infinite, and his ways are past finding out. He is the one true God. He has no beginning and no end. He created all things and all things exist by his divine power. He has no peers. No one gives him advice. No one can fully understand him. He is perfect in all his perfections.

It is against that backdrop that we’re starting a new series today I’m calling “Our Awesome God”. This is also our theme for the year. It is based on Psalm 47:2 which says “*For the Lord Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth.*”

I’ve chosen this because from I want us to have our minds focused, from here on out, on a God who is overwhelmingly incredible and magnificent. I believe

this is a major factor in us overcoming some overwhelming odds in our lives. God is more powerful and able to do more than all we ask or imagine, Amen? If you're overwhelmed by your difficult situation, God can overwhelm you with his grace and power. And as we go through this 6-part series, I want us to be aware of this so that we can face whatever life throws at us.

Today, I'll share with you a message on one quality of God that truly separates him from all his created beings. And I hope we will leave this service today with a sense of awe and wonder that will cause us to see ourselves in relation to him and respond with worship and changed lives. I've entitled this message "Our Holy God". Our text is Isaiah 6:1-8.

In December 1998, Life Magazine devoted an issue to God. On the front cover was one big question: "WHEN YOU THINK OF GOD WHAT DO YOU SEE?"

I began to imagine if that magazine came out today, how we, here in America, might answer that question. I believe there are some people who see a God who looks like Santa Claus, and really doesn't care whether we are naughty or nice; a God who winks at sin and giggles at iniquity; a God who is "too loving to let anyone go to hell", a God who accepts everyone just the way they are, and never bothers trying to change them; a God who gives us everything and never expects anything in return; a God who honors all religions and sees one way to Him just as good as another; a God who is so sweet that He eventually is going to let everybody into heaven.

Well, quite frankly, any of those visions of God might be absolutely on target, except for one small fact-God is a Holy God. Today, more than ever, an overwhelming majority of Americans, with some polls as high as 80%, are saying, "There is a moral crisis in this nation." Specific concerns often center on a lack of consideration for others, declining religious influence, and differing views on

what's right or wrong. So, I believe one of the greatest causes of that moral crisis, is we have lost a vision of the holiness of God. This is true not only in the world, but also in the church.

David Wells, in an outstanding book entitled, *No Place for Truth*, made this salient observation:

“The loss of the traditional vision of God as holy, is now manifested everywhere in the evangelical world. It is the key to understanding why sin and grace have become such empty terms. What depth or meaning. . . can these terms have except in relation to the holiness of God? Divorced from the holiness of God, sin is merely self-defeating behavior or a breach in etiquette. Divorced from the holiness of God, grace is merely empty rhetoric, pious window dressing, for the modern technique by which sinners work out their own salvation.”

Folks, it is this God, majestic and holy in His being, this God whose love knows no bounds because His holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world. He has been replaced in many quarters by a god who is slick and slack, whose moral purposes turn out to be fatherly advice that we can disregard or negotiate as we see fit, whose Word is a play thing for those who wish merely to listen to themselves, whose church is a mall in which the religious, their pockets filled with the coin of need, do their business.

May I say that more than anything else in this world, America needs a fresh vision of God. The church needs a fresh vision of God. You and I need a fresh vision of God. We need to see God not as we think He is, but we need to see God as Isaiah did; the way He really is. For once you see the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the great God in all of his glory, you will not, and cannot, ever be the same again.

Like someone who, one day, saw his name in the obituaries on the newspaper. This person was Alfred Nobel. Nobel was the inventor of the dynamite,

and the newspaper, mistaking him for his brother who died fighting in a war, scathingly described him as a man who had made it possible to kill more people more quickly than anyone else who had ever lived. This is not how Nobel wanted to be remembered, so he decided to use his fortune to institute the Nobel Prizes.

Seeing his obituary while still alive changed Nobel's life. In Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah also saw something that changed his life. Let's look at Isaiah 6:1-8, *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"*

Folks, when you see God as he is, four things will follow as a natural process. First is

1. The Revelation of Holiness.

Isaiah saw the Lord in all of his greatness and all of his grandeur. He had a glimpse of glory never before seen, and never again repeated. It is interesting that Isaiah saw the Lord "in the year that King Uzziah died." (v.1) Now if you are wondering "was that an important year?" Well, it was, if you were King Uzziah! The year was 739 BC. Uzziah was one of the great kings of Judah. Unlike most of

the kings before and after him, he honored God throughout most of his administration.

Because he honored God, his was a reign of plenty. The land literally flowed with milk and honey; the economy was booming. His was also a reign of prosperity. Worldwide trade was at an all-time high. There were two chariots in every garage, a turkey over every fireplace, clean spring bottled water was everywhere. His was also a reign of protection. King Uzziah won every war he fought because the good hand of God was upon him.

But then Uzziah died. It was as if Franklin D. Roosevelt died in the middle of World War II; as if Abraham Lincoln had died in the middle of the Civil War; as if George Washington had died in the middle of the Revolutionary War.

Where everyone else saw despair, discouragement, disillusionment, disappointment, Isaiah saw the King. You notice there are two kings in verse one. One is a dead king, one is a divine King; one is a mortal king, one is an immortal King; one is a human king, one is a heavenly King. One king had died as all kings do, one King lives forever as no king can.

Notice carefully how he sees the Lord. He does not see the Lord pacing back and forth, wringing his hands, barking out orders, breaking out into a cold sweat because King Uzziah had died. When Isaiah saw the Lord, he was "high and exalted, seated on a throne."

Isaiah saw clearly what we need to see completely in these difficult days in which we live, and that is God is on the throne. His hand is on the throttle. He is high and exalted above every ruler, every circumstance, every condition, every problem, every difficulty, and He is in absolute complete control.

Now you will notice in verse one the word Lord begins with a capital letter, and then is finished with lower case letters. But in verse five the word Lord appears in all capital letters. The reason for that is because two different Hebrew words are

used in the original text.

When the word Lord occurs in lower case letters, the translator is indicating to us that this is the word Adonai which is found in the Hebrew Bible. Adonai means "Sovereign One." It is not the name of God; it is a title for God. In fact, it is the supreme title given to God in the Old Testament. When LORD appears in all capital letters, it indicates the Yahweh which is used in the Old Testament.

Yahweh is the sacred name of God. Normally it occurs only with the use of its four consonants, yhwh, that is why it is referred to by the Jews as the "Tetragrammaton" the unspeakable four letters.

So understand, LORD is the name of God; Lord is his title. To speak of President Donald Trump, we would say that Donald was his name, but President was his title. If the highest office in our land is the office of President, the highest office entitled in Israel was the office of Sovereign. The title Adonai was reserved for God. It was later the title given to Jesus in the New Testament. When Christ is called "Lord" he is invested with the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament Adonai. Jesus is called Lord of Lords, and the King of Kings, because he, too, is the supreme Sovereign of this entire universe. Amen?

The point that I want you to see is that the God that Isaiah saw was Adonai, the sovereign God of this universe. We need to be reminded repeatedly in these days of darkness, difficulty, doubt, and despair that God is on the throne, everything is under control; doubt ought to be out, and faith ought to be in.

So, "Have faith in God, "He's on His throne; Have faith in God, He watches o'er His own; He cannot fail-He must prevail; Have faith in God-have faith in God". That's from a hymn titled, "Have Faith in God".

But Isaiah not only saw a sovereign God, he saw a sinless God. Verses 2 and 3 says, "*Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were*

flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'"

In those two verses we are taught, without question, the greatest lesson of God in all of the Bible. For here we see the chief attribute of God. It is not power. The seraphim were not crying out "Omnipotent, omnipotent, omnipotent." The chief attribute is not perception. They were not crying out "Omniscient, omniscient, omniscient." The chief attribute is not presence. They were not crying out "Omnipresent, omnipresent, omnipresent." The chief attribute of God is purity. They were crying out "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty."

You may find it interesting to know that seven out of every twelve references to the name of God in the Old Testament refer to Him as holy. In God there is nothing that is untrue, destructive, or imperfect. There is the essence of purity that defines good and evil. For He is the God who cannot lie, and who cannot commit wrong. He is the thrice holy God of Israel who loves godliness, hates wickedness, and will one day judge this world in righteousness.

The word holy comes from the root word qadesh which literally means "to cut off" or "to separate." Holiness is what separates God from man. Hosea 11:9 says, "*For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you.*" It is what separates God from all false gods. Ex. 15:11 says, "*Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"*

Several years ago a survey was taken of seminary students in seven different seminaries. Thousands of students were surveyed and asked questions about the God they were going to serve. The findings were incredible. They were asked which they preferred between two statements. One statement was: "God's love includes all people; His desire is that all should know Him". Another was: "God is holy; evil will not triumph."

Only 18.5% indicated a preference for the second statement, and only 1.1% indicated that they affirm both statements equally. So, 80.4% preferred the first statement. Now though some students did not like having to choose between the two statements, the question was designed to investigate their foundational understanding of God, and by a ratio of more than four to one, they choose the God of love over the God of holiness.

Well, I think it would be said that in the world around us that ratio would be much higher. So I want to make this statement extremely plain where everyone could understand it. If the God that you know, or claim to know, is not the thrice holy God of Israel, who abhors sin, and will one day judge all evil, then the God you claim to know is not the true God.

Do you see that in the statements of the seraphim the word "holy" is repeated three times? In Hebrew poetry repetition is a form of emphasis. When we want to emphasize the importance of something in English, we have several means of doing so. We might underline a word, put it in italics, put it in bold face type, or attach an exclamation point following the word or phrase.

Sometimes we will use quotation marks. But the Jewish people had different ways to indicate emphasis, and one of the primary ways was the method of repetition. To mention something three times in succession was to elevate it to a superlative degree. It would attach to it the greatest importance.

Only twice in all of the Bible is an attribute of God elevated to the third degree. Here in Isaiah and another in Revelation. And note that the Bible does not say that God is love, love, love, or mercy, mercy, mercy; and until you begin with the holiness of God, you will never understand any of the other attributes of God the way they really are-His love, His grace, His mercy, or His justice.

2. The Realization of Sinfulness

Now immediately after Isaiah gets a real glimpse of the real God, we read:

“Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.’” (v.5a) When Isaiah saw the Lord in his holiness, he saw himself in his sinfulness, and the people in their wickedness.

Now up until this time, Isaiah had been working overtime pointing the finger at other people, condemning the sins of others. If you go back to chapter five you will see in verses 8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22, he is giving "woes" to everybody else. But when he sees the Lord he says, "Woe to me, I am ruined!"

When Isaiah saw God in his holiness, he saw himself in his hellishness. When his soul was placed against the bright pure holiness of God, his white became black, his right became wrong, his might became weak. Until you see God as He really is, you will never see you as you really are. Until you meet God, you will never know that your biggest problem is you.

Once you see God in His glory then you will see your sin, and you will understand His grace. Two men were traveling on a train and one man introduced himself as a preacher. The other man said, "Well, since you are a preacher I want to ask you a question. How can a God of love send a man to hell?" The preacher said, "Let me answer your question with a greater question-'How can a God of holiness take a sinner to heaven?'"

Did you know that there are actually three people sitting in your seat right now. There is the person you hope you are. There is the person others think you are. Then there is the person that God knows you are. There was a time Isaiah I'm sure thought he was a great prophet. To his peers Isaiah was a man of unquestioned integrity, righteousness, and virtue. But then he caught just one glimpse of a Holy God, and just one look is all it took. It took deity to reveal his dirtiness, it took God to reveal his guilt.

At that moment, Isaiah cannot help but cry out loud, "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips." (v.5) True conviction always brings true confession.

Whenever a person refuses his sin or excuses his sin, it is because he has never truly been convicted of his sin.

The Hebrew word for “ruined” and in some versions, undone, means to come apart at the seams. Isaiah had been totally exposed for who he was and what he was before the gaze of a holy and a righteous God. God had exposed his sin. Isaiah refused to excuse his sin, and because of that he was made right with God.

Folks, regardless of your excuses, sin is a prison from which you can never be freed, until you admit it is your own fault that you were thrown in the slammer.

I heard of a king that was on board one of these ancient ships that was rode by slaves. He went below to visit the slave galley where these men were shackled down to the oars. This was punishment for being prisoners, for disobeying the laws of the state and of the land. The king was down there walking among these men and talking to them, and he asked one man, "Why are you here?"

He said, "Sire, I was just praying you would ask me that question. Some of my enemies falsely accused me." The king said, "Oh, that is terrible. I am so sorry to hear that." He then asked another prisoner. "Why are you here?" He said, "Well Sire, I just happened to be on a street corner when a crime was committed, and I was arrested with the other people. But I was doing nothing wrong." He said, "Oh, that's just horrible."

Well, as he went down the line talking to every prisoner, every prisoner had some excuse, some justification, some reason for being there. It was always someone else's fault. They were just innocent by-standers. Nobody would admit they were there for anything they had done.

Finally, he came to one last man and said, "And why are you here?" The man hung his head and said, "Sire, I am here because I have sinned. I have sinned against myself, I have sinned against the state, I have sinned you, the king, and I have sinned against God; that's why I'm here. I am a criminal and I am suffering

for what I have done."

The King said, "You scoundrel, you rogue, you vile wicked person, what are you doing here among so many honest and upright men? Guard! loose this man and let him go."

Always remember that the real mark of having seen the real God is when real conviction comes into your heart and leads you to real confession.

3. The Regeneration of Forgiveness

"Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'"

(v.6-7) Seraphim, btw, refer to angelic beings with six wings. Isaiah chapter 6 is the only place in the Bible that specifically mentions the seraphim. One of them, a Seraph, takes a blazing white hot coal off of the altar and touches the lips of the prophet. Now why the lips? Isaiah himself had emphasized that his lips, and the lips of his people, were unclean. Why did he not touch the heart?

Well, if you remember, Jesus said in Matt. 12:34, *"You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."* Isaiah had a dirty mouth because he had a dirty heart. But these Seraphim, and the word Seraphim literally means "flame bearers" or "burning ones", come and touch his lips with a hot coal from a flaming fire.

Do you see that when Isaiah came clean, Isaiah was made clean. When Isaiah confessed his sin, God cleansed his sin. 1 John 1:9 says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

God can use you if you are physically handicapped. God can use you if you are mentally challenged. God can use you if you are emotionally confused. But God cannot use you if you are spiritually dirty.

We need clean lips to witness for God. We need clean hands to work for God. We need clean feet to walk before God. We need clean hearts to worship God. And the holiness of God, which reveals the sinfulness of man, will always result in the forgiveness of sin.

4. The Reservation For Usefulness

Now immediately after the cleansing comes the calling. Verse 8a, *"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'"* God does not demand a perfect vessel, but He does demand a clean vessel. After the cleansing came the calling, and after the calling came the commitment. Isaiah did not hesitate, he did not equivocate, he stepped right up to the front and said, *"Here am I! send me."* (v8b) He didn't say, "Here am I! send him." He said without hesitation, "Here am I! send me."

He didn't say, "Wait, wait, why me? Are you sure? I've got things to do. I think I'm better off doing this other thing. What if I fail? But this is difficult." Isaiah signed a contract before it was even typed. No excuses, no ifs and buts.

He had no idea where he would go. He had no idea what he would do. He had no idea when he would leave. He had no idea why it would work. He just simply said, "Wherever you lead, I'll go; whatever you ask, I'll do; whatever you want, I'll give." You will never have that kind of attitude until you truly catch a glimpse of a holy God high and exalted.

Folks, a saying goes, "God is not interested in your ability, but in your availability." I would add that ability, without availability, is liability. I tell you today that God can do anything with you at any time in any place if you will just say, "Here am I! Send me."

How do you know that you've seen the right God? How do you know that you know the right God? When you know God in all of His holiness, you will see yourself in all of your sinfulness. You will not stop until you receive His

forgiveness, and then you will give the rest of your life to His usefulness.