

# **ISAIAH:** **THE GLORY OF GOD IN A WORLD OF CHAOS**

Part 1: “The Glory of God in a World of Chaos”

Isaiah 6:1-8

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## **Scripture Reading**

**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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

<sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> 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!”

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

<sup>8</sup> And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”<sup>1</sup>

*Almighty and Everlasting God, even now, as we speak, you are enthroned in heaven. From age to age, angels declare your holiness. In our age of fear and rage and chaos, I pray that your Holy Spirit would give us unveiled eyes to behold your glory and hearts that would receive your transforming grace. Give us eyes to see Jesus, so that our lives might display his beauty to a watching world. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, your Son, and our Savior. AMEN.*

## **Introduction**

This morning, we are beginning a new sermon series entitled **“Isaiah: The Glory of God in a World of Chaos.”** The book of Isaiah is one of my favorite books of the Bible, and I am excited that we will be spending some extended time in this Old Testament book this fall.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 6:1–8.

Now, if you have been a part of Redeemer for any amount of time, you will know that in our sermons, we tend to walk through entire books of the Bible line by line, verse by verse. What we are going to do in this series is going to be a little bit different. I am still going to exposit various passages in Isaiah, but I am going to do so in what is called a surveyed approach. So instead of examining each verse of this book, we are going to look at key passages that will give you a sense of the big ideas and themes of Isaiah.

Isaiah is a very long book, with sixty-six chapters. Even though we won't hit every chapter, I hope that by the end of this sermon series, you will have a good grasp of what Isaiah is about. And I pray that this series will provoke you to dig deeper into one of the most beautiful books in the Old Testament.

Our scripture reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 6, which recounts the moment during which Isaiah is called to become a prophet. I chose Isaiah 6 as opposed to Isaiah 1 to begin our series for two reasons. Firstly, Isaiah 6 gives us a picture of the historical *context* surrounding the book of Isaiah. Secondly, I believe that the story of Isaiah's calling functions as a *gateway* into the rest of his book.

Isaiah's ministry begins at the twilight of a golden age for the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, in the year 740 B.C., "*the year that king Uzziah died*" (Isa 6:1). The kingdom of Judah is in the south, the kingdom of Israel is in the north [[show image 1Judah and Israel Divided](#)]. These two kingdoms of God's people have been divided for generations. However, in recent years both nations have enjoyed prosperity and peace.

The latest king of Judah was a man named Uzziah. Initially, Uzziah's reign was very positive and successful. He expanded the armies of Judah. He built new cities and fortresses. Under his leadership, the national economy flourished, and he reigned for more than fifty years.

But as an older man, 2 Chronicles 26:16 says, King Uzziah's "grew proud." In Hebrew, literally, his "heart" was "lifted up" (גָּבַהַ לְבָבוֹ). And he decided that he wanted to do something he had always wanted to do his whole life. He wanted to go inside the inner chamber of the temple and offer up incense to God. The only problem with this is that the law of God specifically said only priests were allowed to enter into the holy place within the temple. But Uzziah was a good king. He was a successful king. For fifty years, no one had ever told him "no." So, with a "lifted up heart" he did what he wanted. He presumptuously entered the inner chamber of the temple, despite the warnings and pleadings of the priests. As he raged at their resistance, his body began to break out with leprosy. He recognized his error and retreated immediately. But, sadly, Uzziah never recovered. And he died in disgrace.

Uzziah was a king who once showed so much promise. But his reign ends in shame.

In many ways, the king is a good picture of the spiritual condition of the people of God in Judah. After generations of relative comfort and peace, the people of Judah have grown complacent. Socially, there is rampant injustice, oppression, and corruption.

Spiritually, the people will go to the temple and make sacrifices. They will pray to God. But, in reality, they are just going through the motions, and their hearts are far from God.

To make matters worse, the Assyrian Empire to the north has grown powerful and hungry [show image of Assyria with Judah and Israel]. For many years, the tiny kingdoms of Israel and Judah have enjoyed peace because the nations of Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria were either internally weak or externally distracted. But that is not true anymore. A new king has risen in Assyria by the name of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 b.c.) [show image of Tiglath-Pileser III], and his eyes are set on Israel and Judah. Dark thunderhead clouds are gathering, and a storm of war is coming.

This is the world of Isaiah. His world is in chaos. His king is dead. His people are complacent. Invasion is coming. So, Isaiah comes to the temple, and he prays so that he might make sense out of all of this. And as he prays, the veil that lies over reality is lifted – and he sees the glory of the Lord.

All of Isaiah's subsequent ministry is a response to this encounter with the living God [show image of "Prophet Isaiah" by Michelangelo]. God calls Isaiah to be a prophet, a spokesperson, and an ambassador of heaven. Isaiah is given inspired words to write down. In his book, he declares words of justice and judgment. He declares words of comfort and hope. He gives a global and cosmic vision of God's plans and purposes in history. But more than anything else, he shows over and over again that salvation comes only from the Lord. In fact, that is what Isaiah's name means – *"the Lord is salvation"* (יהוֹשִׁיעַ).

I think we would do well to look to the words of the Prophet Isaiah. Though we are separated by centuries from Isaiah, we too live in a world of chaos. This last year has been a year in which the whole world has been turned upside down by disease and division. The realms of education, economics, health, and politics are all uncertain and unsure. It is so easy in this moment to fix our eyes only on the things of the material world.

My prayer is that, in this series, Isaiah's spirit-inspired words will confront and convict us where we have grown self-focused and spiritually complacent. I pray that Isaiah's words will give us comfort and hope where we have grown despondent. But more than anything, I pray that Isaiah would be able to give us a glimpse of the bigness of God. We, too, need unveiled eyes that are able to behold the glory of God in a world of chaos.

In the time we have left today, I want to walk us through three themes of Isaiah 6 that are consequently three of the major themes of Isaiah's entire book: *1.) The Unfathomable Holiness of God, 2.) The Unbearable Gravity of Sin, 3.) The Transforming Power of Grace.*

## **Exposition**

### **1. The Unfathomable Holiness of God**

We live in the Bible belt, where there are many people who profess belief in God. Yet, oftentimes, many professed believers live lives that are virtually indistinguishable from those who are unbelievers. In other words, there is a disconnect between one's belief in God and how that belief affects one's life.

This was the situation of the kingdom of Judah during Isaiah's lifetime. Plenty of people went through the motions of worship and professed belief in God, but, for many, God had become unreal to them. What occupied their imagination was their king, their comfort, and how the outside nations might be a threat to them.

But for a moment, Isaiah is able to see something else. He enters into the temple to pray, and suddenly, he sees a vision of heaven. He sees the Lord, high and lifted up, with a royal robe that fills the entirety of the temple.

Suddenly, Isaiah's awareness of God outshines his awareness of anything else. All issues of prior concern are trivialized in the encounter. Isaiah came to mourn the death of the king. But now, he knows that the true king of heaven and earth has never left his throne!

A myriad of thousands upon thousands of angels fly around the throne of heaven (cf. Rev 5:11), like flames of fire. They each have six wings: with two they shield their faces from God's glory, with two they cover their feet, and with two they fly (Isa 6:2).

Before the presence of the one who commands the galaxies, all they can do is proclaim his holiness: *"And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!'"* (Isaiah 6:3, ESV).

All that can be said of this God is that he is "holy"; that he is unlike anything in all of creation! He is perfect, pure, and set apart! He is infinite, eternal, and all-powerful! He is the Great "I Am" who is contingent upon nothing!

The angels repeat three times: "Holy, holy, holy!" This is the only three-fold repetition in the Old Testament. It means God is infinite perfection, multiplied by infinite perfection, multiplied by infinite perfection.

Now, in the Ancient Near East, each nation had their own tribal god. But the Lord is no patron deity or divine mascot for the kingdom of Judah or Israel. He is the creator who possesses universal dominion over heaven and earth. The whole earth is full of his glory!

The reality of God shatters all our preconceived notions of the divine. We cannot contain him within the categories of our experience and reason. Too often, people succumb to the temptation to create for ourselves a god who fits neatly in our tidy categories and serves our tiny causes. As the French philosopher, Voltaire once said, "God made man in his own image, and man has more than returned the favor."

We cannot achieve a knowledge of such an infinite God through human reason or virtue. The only way we can know God is if he graciously reveals himself to us. And yet, that is exactly what our God does!

He intervenes into our situation. He has spoken through the words of Scripture. He has entered into human history through his Son Jesus. He testifies to our hearts through the continuing ministry of his Holy Spirit.

The distractions of our world are almost overwhelming. Thousands of voices are vying for our attention. It is crucial in this time for us to draw near to the living God!

We need to prioritize the spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture reading, and corporate worship. We need to humbly ask the Holy Spirit to give us eyes that see the Lord, ears that hear his voice, and hearts love him above all other desires.

In a chaotic world, we must be a people who cultivate an awareness of the unfathomable holiness of God, so that the glory of God would outshine everything else.

## **2. The Unbearable Gravity of Sin**

When Isaiah encounters this vision of God's holiness, he is immediately confronted with a sense of profound unworthiness. He says, "Woe is me! For I am lost." The Hebrew word used for "lost" can literally mean, "I am undone, unraveled, and destroyed!"

Before God's holiness, Isaiah is now acutely aware of his own sin, as well as the sin of his people: "...I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5).

All games are over. Isaiah doesn't attempt to make excuses or argue for extenuating circumstances. He doesn't say, "well, mistakes were made." He owns his failure. And he acknowledges and confesses that his sin is a fatal problem (Rom 6:23).

But this is not the typical way that we look at our failure. It is often easy for us to see the failings or hypocrisy of others. But when it comes to our own sin, we tend to minimize, ignore, or find a sense of self-justification by comparing ourselves to others.

Like the Pharisee who prayed, "Lord, thank you that I am not a sinner like that tax-collector over there," we believe in our heart of hearts, "Hey, I'm not perfect, but at least I'm not a neo-Nazi or a member of ANTIFA."

We can only get away with this self-deception when we are comparing our righteousness to the unrighteousness of others. We only get away with this when we fix our eyes on creation rather than the Creator (cf. Rom 1:25), and we measure goodness in terms of this world.

But when we truly look at the holiness of God, we are confronted with the fact that for so much of our lives, we have not worshipped the Sovereign Lord. Instead, we have worshipped the sovereign self. Yet, so much of our daily lives in the modern world are structured to keep us from this uncomfortable truth.

This is why in our times of corporate worship, we always have a moment (before we take the Lord's Supper) for private reflection, confession, and contemplation. Against the frantic hum and busyness of our world, we invite one another to sit in silence before the Lord of hosts.

We believe it is good and godly to remember that we are dependent creatures. It is good and godly to remember that we are a people in need.

We are invited by the grace of God to consider our enduring tendency to self-absorption. We acknowledge the ways we have been estranged from God and one another. We confess where we have put ourselves in the place of God and contributed to the brokenness of creation. And we repent of our sin so that we might receive and rest in the gift of grace.

To recognize the gravity of sin is not an act of self-hatred or self-condemnation. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that we are unable to save ourselves. It is what makes us aware that when we come before God, we come before him with nothing but the empty hands of faith. And it is here, where we encounter grace.

### **3. The Transforming Power of Grace**

Isaiah is still and silent as a dead man. He cannot move or speak. But God does not make Isaiah jump through hoops to earn his grace. He does not require Isaiah to come to him or meet him half-way.

In his grace, God sends an angel, who flies to the "altar" (זֶבֶח). The angel uses tongs to clasp a burning coal, and he touches that coal to Isaiah's lips (Isa 6:6). The angel then announces, "*Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for*" (Isa 6:7).

This moment does not make Isaiah better. This moment makes Isaiah *new*. He is forever changed and transformed. That transformation is all the more evident is the next verse: "*And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me'*" (Isa 6:8).

In an instant, Isaiah goes from a cowering sinner who is undone by the presence of God, to a missionary prophet who is commissioned and empowered to be an ambassador of heaven! Isaiah is *saved* by grace, and then Isaiah is *sent* by grace.

What do we make of this? It is significant that the power that changes Isaiah comes from the altar. What is the altar? The altar is a place of sacrifice and substitution.

At the time of Isaiah's ministry, there was a temple that stood in the city of Jerusalem. It was here in Jerusalem that animals were sacrificed so that the sins of God's people would be atoned for.

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was designed to show the Jewish people that sin creates death, that God is righteous, and that the only way for God to have a

relationship with a sinful people is for the penalty of sin to be paid for by a substitute. For the people of the Old Testament, that meant you had to sacrifice animal after animal in order to be considered clean before God.

But Isaiah gets something different. When the coal of this altar touches his lips, he is declared clean forever.

That's because Isaiah's vision is not of the temple of Jerusalem. His vision is of the true temple of heaven, of which the temple on earth was but a shadow. And for all of time in eternity past and eternity future, there is an altar in heaven on which an atoning sacrifice has been made by the lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world (cf. Rev 13:8, NIV)– the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29).

Like Isaiah, none of us could ever atone for our own sin, but the good news is that God sent one who could. God sent forth his only Son to step down from his glorious throne room where he was worshipped, to come to this earth in humility, to empty himself, to climb onto a cross, and to make one perfect sacrifice upon the very altar of heaven. God sent forth Jesus to live the life we should have lived, to die the death we should have died, and to rise again to newness of life.

If that sacrifice of Jesus was so powerful that it can go back in time to atone for Isaiah's sin, it is powerful enough to cleanse you today!

Jesus has taken your place and your penalty, and by faith, you are imputed with his righteousness. Like Isaiah, if you are a Christian, you have been saved by grace and grace alone. He has not saved you in your most worthy moment. He has saved you in the midst of your unworthiness. He gives you an identity that you do not have to earn and a purpose of eternal significance.

## **Conclusion**

Like Isaiah, we too are called and commissioned to be ambassadors of New Creation. We are called to be prophetic emissaries, who are defined by our allegiance to a new king and new kingdom.

Like Isaiah, we too live in a volatile and chaotic age. Yet, we have been given a task to declare the gospel with our words and display the gospel with our lives to our neighbors and the nations.

Like Isaiah, our message will at times fall on deaf ears (see Isa 6:9-13). But make no mistake, God is on the throne. His justice and salvation are coming. He is bending history toward redemption.

So, Redeemer Christian Church, may we have eyes to see the glory of our holy God. May we see ever our need for salvation and rest in the finished work of our Savior. And may

we become prophetic ambassadors, who declare and display that the Lord is our Salvation! *AMEN*.

### **Discussion Starters for Gospel Community**

- 1. Read Isaiah 6:1-8. Summarize this passage in your own words.***
- 2. The angels declare God's holiness with a three-fold repetition. What are some practical ways we can cultivate a deeper awareness of God's holiness in our lives?***
- 3. When Isaiah encounters God's holiness, he is immediately aware of his sin and unworthiness. Yet Isaiah's knowledge of his sin prepares him to receive the gift of divine grace. Why is a biblical understanding of sin necessary for a biblical understanding of salvation? Have there been moments in your life in which you have been truly convicted of sin?***
- 4. Isaiah's sin is cleansed and atoned for by a coal taken from the altar of heaven. How might this moment foreshadow the redeeming work of Jesus?***
- 5. In what way is Isaiah transformed in this passage? How have you been transformed by grace?***



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