

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." <sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> "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." <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." <sup>8</sup> 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!"

### God's holiness changes you!

People who come face to face with God's glory and God's holiness were are the same. God's holiness changes you altogether. Moses stood before the burning bush and took off his sandals, because he was walking on holy ground in the presence of God. He had been perfectly content to tend the sheep in the wilderness when God's holiness called him to change the whole direction of his life. He would become God's ambassador to the Pharaoh and the greatest prophet of the Old Testament.

It was the same for the Apostle Paul. On the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Saul in a blinding light from heaven. Jesus's glory blinded him and made him see all at the same time. It changed him from being an enemy of God's church to being an ambassador of Christ to the Gentiles. Paul walked the streets and highways of the Roman empire to bring the gospel of Jesus to as many people as he possibly could.

God's holiness always changes you. It changed Isaiah in the same way that it changed Paul and Moses. Do you see the similarities in these three men? In all three God's holiness destroyed them, and saved them and sent them. God's holiness does the same to us.

### I. God's holiness destroys you

In this text, Isaiah tells us about the day that the Lord called him to be a prophet. King Uzziah of Judah died, and he was the last really good king of Judah. After this, the nation of Judah would rapidly decline. In another 150 years, Judah would be taken into the Babylonian captivity. The northern kingdom of Israel was already in shambles. This was about 740 B.C. and Israel would be destroyed by Assyria in 722 B.C. Isaiah would preach to a church in shambles.

God gave Isaiah a vision. He saw the LORD in this temple, sitting on a throne. Above him were hovering angels. They are called seraphs, a name for a special rank of angels that is used only here. They are fiery angels and beautiful to see. But these high-ranking angels are nothing compared to the Lord of Hosts. With two wings they cover their feet out of respect for the LORD. With two wings they covered their faces in all humility before the LORD Almighty. The beauty of God's holiness holds them in utter awe. Think about that for a moment. The holy ones are held in complete awe and amazement at the HOLY ONE.

These amazing angels are singing a song. "**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.**" Why three times holy? For two reasons. One is because we have a Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, and it is fitting that the song they sing is, "Holy, holy, holy." Another reason

is that saying holy three times means that God's holiness is more than we could ever imagine. When the Hebrew makes a superlative, it often repeats the word. To say "pure gold," it might say "gold gold." A lump of gold ore is gold, but when it is refined many times it looks like gold. It is golden gold. We do the same in our language. A man's man is the epitome of what a man should be like. The LORD is not just holy. He is even more than holy, holy. He is holy, holy, holy. There is nothing and no one to compare to God's holiness.

The angels say that not only is the LORD Almighty holy, holy, holy. The whole earth is full of his glory. What does that mean? God's holiness is perfection. God's holiness is his beauty. It is a beauty that holds the attention of the angels, who cannot stop gazing at the beauty of the LORD in his temple. Why is the world full of God's glory? Look at a beautiful sunset and you can't take your eyes off of it. Look at a beautiful flower and you immediately want to put it on your kitchen table so you can see it every day. The beauty we see all around us in God's creation remind us that God is perfect and holy and beautiful. The whole earth is a reflection of God's perfection.

There is more to Isaiah's vision. **"At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke."** The temple shakes with the presence of God. Just as there is weight to pure gold, there is weightiness to God's holiness and God's glory. When God appeared on Mt. Sinai, the mountain shook. When he came to Elijah on Mt. Horeb, which was also Mt. Sinai, the mountain shook. When the LORD Almighty died on the cross, the city of Jerusalem shook.

What effect did this have on Isaiah? Did he jump up and down with joy? Did he join the angels in their song of praise? No. Just the opposite. **"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."** "I am ruined. I am destroyed. I am undone!" Isaiah cries out. God's holiness destroyed him. There was a scene in a movie called, "The Raiders of the Lost Ark." The German soldiers had the Ark of the Covenant, the most sacred piece of furniture in the temple. On the lid were two golden angels with four wings - cherubim, covering the cover of the ark. The German soldier opened the lid, and a brilliant light shone in his face. His eyes were wide with wonder as if he were looking at the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his life. And then - his face melted!

Isaiah melted before God's holiness, too. He melted on the inside. Any pride that he might have had in himself as someone who was born into a noble family was gone. Any thought that he could somehow stand before God in his holiness with his unmasked self disappeared. He realized that nothing in his life could stand the scrutiny of God's holiness. From his writing, it is evident that Isaiah was an eloquent man, a great speaker and writer. But what comes out of this eloquent lips? **"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."** God's holiness destroys any self-esteem he might have had.

It must do the same to us, because we cannot stand before the LORD Almighty clothed in our own pretext and pretension. Maybe you've watched some of the NBA finals. I am amazed at how good they are. Steph Curry makes driving the lane amidst the giants look easy. Kevin Durant takes one step and slams a dunk. LeBron James sinks a 35 foot shot falling away. Maybe you played basketball in high school. Maybe you even started on your team. But what would you feel like if you were suddenly thrown into a game with NBA stars? You'd feel about 2 inches tall. You would look ridiculously clumsy and incompetent. By comparison, you would be no more than a by-stander. Well, that's nothing compared to standing before a God who is Holy, Holy, Holy.

Isaiah said he had a dirty mouth. So do we, with all our little lies and petty gossip. We have unclean hands as well, because much of what we do does not give glory to God but only to ourselves. We have eyes that should gaze on the beauty of God's holiness. Instead, we allow ourselves to see sinful things that enter our hearts and minds. I am ruined, I am undone, I am destroyed before the LORD Almighty, who is perfect in holiness and whose glory fills the earth.

Have you experienced that moment in your life when you realize you are nothing before our holy God? Do you experience it often? If you don't, you will not appreciate fully your God and your Savior. If you aren't destroyed by God's holiness, you will become like the Pharisees who hated Jesus because Jesus showed them how sinful they were. You will become like Pontius Pilate, who thought Jesus nothing more than a petty nuisance in his person quest for making something of himself in life.

Don't you see? God's holiness must destroy you before it can save you!

## II. God's holiness saves you

What Isaiah experienced in a few moments, Luther experienced over a number of years. When Luther was studying to become a lawyer, he was walking through the forest, when a thunderbolt struck a tree close by. He was so that he promised to become a monk. As a monk he prayed and beat himself and studied into the morning hours to try to gain holiness, but his conscience found no peace. He was terrified of God's holiness, God's righteousness. No matter how hard he tried to earn it, he could not obtain it.

Then one day as he studied the scriptures, he read in Romans that there was a righteousness, a holiness, that came from God and which God gave out freely to all who believe in Jesus. From that moment on, Luther's conscience was set free. He studied the Bible all over again and suddenly saw with new eyes how the Bible everywhere tells us that God freely gives us the holiness that we need to stand before him.

Isn't that what Isaiah's vision is all about as well? **Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."** Never in a million years could Isaiah imagine being anything before God but a dreadful sinner. Then God gave him what he never thought he could have. God gave him holiness.

Why a live coal from the altar? On the altar in the temple, God's people sacrificed the lambs that atoned for their sins. We know that these lambs really didn't atone for anything. They only spoke of the Lamb of God, the only sacrifice that could take away the sins of the world. And just as even a coal from the altar could hide his sins, so even a drop of the blood of Jesus can take away all of our sins.

Isaiah understood it. In the book of Isaiah, he would use the name for the Savior and call him "the Holy one of Israel." In the rest of the Bible that name only appears six times. Isaiah uses that name 29 times. The Holy one of Israel did not use his holiness to destroy him, but to save him!

And dare I say this? We understand this even better than Isaiah did or ever could. We understand it because we have seen Jesus. John said in his gospel, **"Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him."** <sup>John 12.41</sup> We have seen Jesus, the LORD Almighty, the Holy One of Israel. We have gazed upon his perfect life and seen the beauty of a man who did nothing wrong. We have seen an unselfish Jesus who lived every moment for his neighbor's good and for his Father's glory. We have seen Jesus mount the cross to endure the shame of our sins, lest we would be forced to endure their eternal shame. Is there anything more beautiful than the very Son of God dying on the cross so that he could rescue the damned? No other religion in the world has anything like such a God who would do this for his people. We see God's holiness in Jesus better than Isaiah ever could..

Friends, his holiness has saved you. It has covered you and hidden your sins from God's sight. It has changed from the damned to the saved. It has made you holy in the sight of God, even if you don't feel it today. Someday you will. By faith today you are - a saint - a holy one in the eyes of God.

## III. God's holiness sends you.

What was Isaiah's immediate reaction to God's revelation? **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!"** How can we not be excited to serve this holy God who has made us holy by his blood? I know you can't imagine playing with the Cavaliers or the Warriors. But what if God made you seven foot tall? What if he gave you the speed of Steph Curry or the braun of LeBron James? Wouldn't you love to play the game if you were fully qualified to play it?

And what if God gave you sanctified lips to sing his praise? And what if God gave you hands that were pure to do his work and not just your own? And what if God gave you a heart that was filled with a love for your neighbor and a joy to serve others? God has sanctified you. The blood of Jesus made you holy, and his Holy Spirit sanctifies you through and through. He has fully equipped you to go in his name.

**"Here I am. Send me!"** Send me to do what? Send me to do, Lord, whatever you want me to do. That doesn't mean serving him will be easy. It wasn't for Isaiah. In the words that follow our text, God describes Isaiah's ministry to an obstinate people who would hear but not listen, who would see but not understand. According to some traditions, Isaiah's life came to an end when angry Israelites sawed him in half. God not only calls us to do the fun stuff, but the hard stuff, too. **"Here I am, send me!"**

It may not be easy for you. You may live in a family that doesn't love Jesus as it should. You may carry the heavy lifting of bringing the Word of God to them because you have a spouse that doesn't care. **Send me!** Maybe God has sent you to take care of your feeble mother, and your brothers and sisters don't lift a finger to help. That's God's work. **Send me!** You may live with scoffing neighbors and co-workers who all but stick their fingers in the ears if you bring up Jesus. **Send me!** Some of God's work has little glory to it. Cutting the lawn at church. Visiting shut-ins. Visiting wayward members that like to hide rather than hear the gospel. **"Here am I. Send me!"**

If you see the beauty of God's holiness in the face of Jesus, your life will never be the same. It will turn your life around, every day. Amen.