**Holiness**

Isaiah 6

Today marks the shift into ***Part 3 of our journey through the Bible***. We walked through the foundational teachings about God in the first five books of the Bible, called the Torah or **the Law**. Then we studied the **historical** section of Scripture from the time of the judges and the conquest through the kingdom, the exile and return.



Now we move into the **PROPHETS**. From now through July we will study Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Then in late summer we will finally arrive in the New Testament! Hopefully through this series and your personal reading you are seeing how *the whole Bible is ONE STORY and it all points to JESUS!*

Today our word is **HOLINESS**. Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets in Israel’s history - a truly holy man, devoted to proclaiming the Word of the Lord to the nation of Israel. He served during the reigns of four or five kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. The King of Assyria threatened Jerusalem during the time of King Hezekiah, but in answer to Isaiah’s prayers, God miraculously saved them by wiping out the Assyrian army. In this way the southern kingdom was preserved from conquest for a time but the northern kingdom of Israel had already been conquered and carried off into exile.



So these were turbulent times; times of fear, danger and uncertainty. Our chapter begins today ***“in the year that King Uzziah died.”*** This was the first King Isaiah served beside.

In the historical books he is called Azariah - different names for the same guy. ***He was generally a good king***, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord and reigning for fifty two years. But toward the end of his like, King Azariah became proud and decided to enter the Temple and burn incense on his own - work that was explicitly reserved for PRIESTS ONLY - not Kings. The Priests confronted him but the King grew angry with them until he realized that God had stricken him with leprosy. In judgment for his disrespect for the holy presence of God in the temple area, ***Azariah was quarantined as a leper for the rest of his life***, forced to step down as king and let his son reign in his place.

So this is the context for Isaiah’s vision. The King was punished with leprosy for daring to enter the holy place of the Temple. ***And Isaiah sees the LORD ALMIGHTY in the Temple***. Verse 1:

“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.” Isaiah 6:1

**The Temple was HOLY**. It was the most sacred place in Israel - the place God chose to establish His Name. Other gods were worshiped wherever people were, like convenience stores all over the place. But God explicitly told His people not to worship Him in that way - but instead to gather at the place HE would designate and where a Temple would one day be built for Him. Symbolically God was saying, “I am the One True God - there is no other like me or beside me. And there is only One Place to worship and serve me.”

That is what Jerusalem was and the center of Jerusalem was the Temple. The most holy place in the most holy city was where God met with His people, where the glory of God dwelt.

***To be HOLY simply means to be set apart.*** So in a trivial way, you could make anything holy by saying: 1) I only wear these socks when the Bucs have a football game (those are holy socks) or; 2) I only use this mug when I drink coffee with my dad (that’s a holy mug) or; 3) I only open this photo album once a year on our anniversary (that’s a holy relic).

***The Temple was holy in a much more serious way***. King Uzziah was not the first to be stricken in the Temple area, nor would he be the last. The two sons of Aaron had this idea hundreds of years before him. You’d think he would have known this story and could have learned from it. Nadab and Abihu took censers and went into the Holy Place of the Temple to burn incense before the Lord. But only the High Priest was authorized for this duty. Only One Person - their father, Aaron - had been set apart to burn incense before the Lord in this way. So...

“And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. **3** Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord has said: ‘Among those who are near me **I will be sanctified**, and before all the people **I will be glorified**.’” Leviticus 10:2-3

Similarly, the Holy Items were holy in a serious way. The Ark of the Covenant represented the presence and glory of God, containing the stone tablets of the 10 commandments that stood for the covenant between a Holy God and His people. When a man named Uzzah dared to touch the Ark this is what happened:

“Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, **and God struck him down** there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.” 2 Samuel 6:6-7

***The Ark was not to be touched.*** It was to be carried on poles so that no sinful person would touch it. Uzzah made the very false assumption that his hands were more holy than the ground. His mistake cost him his life.

These stories illustrate HOLINESS. They help us understand what it means to say the Ark of the Covenant was holy. The Temple was holy. And by understanding how totally sacred and uniquely set apart these things were we can begin to understand the HOLINESS of God.

Today we’ll see **three steps to responding to the holiness of God**.

**Responding to God’s Holiness**

1. See God’s Glory
2. Experience God’s Grace
3. Commit to God’s Mission

First, we have to see God’s glory - we have to realize how utterly holy and set apart God is. He is totally unlike any other god and is glorious beyond what we can imagine. When we see the holiness and glory of God we realize, like Isaiah, the depths of our own sin - and that provides the opportunity to experience the cleansing touch of the Lord Jesus. And those who have experienced God’s grace become agents of that grace - ambassadors devoted to spreading the Gospel of God’s glory and grace.

1. **See God’s Glory**

“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.” Isaiah 6:1

The first step is to see God’s glory. The lesson from King Uzziah is that ***we don’t set the terms for an encounter with God.*** That is a dangerous path. God sets the terms. We approach Him as He has instructed us to. We know Him as He has chosen to make Himself known.

For Isaiah, it was in this vision - ***a special glimpse into the very throne room of God***. In verse 5 Isaiah is undone, despairing of life itself “for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” God taught Moses that no one can see God and live. Even the first great prophet, Moses, was not allowed to see the face of God. Moses spoke with God as a man speaks with a friend, but God only showed Moses His back. For no human - in our current condition - can see God and live. It would be like looking directly at the sun - it would burn up your corneas.

The glory of God is shown symbolically here, demonstrating **God’s absolute supremacy**. The throne represents God’s supreme ***POWER***. Every king has a throne, but this throne was massive and elevated. He was seated in a temple, wearing a royal robe so rich and luxurious that it filled the whole temple area. That is some serious fabric.

1. **See God’s Glorious POWER**

“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.” Isaiah 6:1

God is the King of Kings. His authority is unparalleled. He reigns absolutely over all things. God is SOVEREIGN. Have you seen the Lord exalted in sovereign power?

I have led dozens of people through a Bible study using the Gospel of Mark called Christianity Explored. The homework for the first session has you read over Mark 1 and 2 to see the authority of Jesus. Right there in the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry you see him heal lots of people, cast out demons, forgive the sins of a paralyzed man (and then tell him to get up and walk) and teach with unusual authority. One woman, after our discussion of Jesus’ amazing authority in these areas said, “Wow. It seems like Jesus has authority over EVERYTHING.”

Light bulb! Yes. That is exactly what Mark was getting at. Jesus is the KING. Messiah to the Jewish people meant KING. We hear Messiah and think Savior but they didn’t. They knew the Messiah would be the Davidic King - that He would reign over Israel and re-establish their kingdom.

But God is not only supreme in power, He is also supreme in PURITY.

1. **See God’s Glorious PURITY**

“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.” Isaiah 6:2

This angelic vision reminds us we are seeing something beyond what is normal on earth - we are in ***the throne room of God in heaven***. And even these holy angels - who are untarnished by sin - cover their feet and faces before the radiant glory of God.

1. **See God’s Glorious PURITY**

“And one called to another and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts…’” Isaiah 6:3

John the apostle saw a similar vision as recorded in **Revelation 4**, in which four living creatures, each with six wings, hover around God’s throne and they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” The ***triple statement*** of the word holy conveys the completeness of God’s purity.

As the old hymn says:

*Holy, holy, holy*

*Though the darkness hide Thee*

*Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see*

*Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee*

*Perfect in power, in love, and purity*

***God is utterly untarnished by sin*** - like oil and water; like light and darkness; like a just washed and bleached white sheet flapping in the breeze in a Tide commercial. Have you seen God in His absolute purity? Do you realize how exalted He is in holiness?

The throne represents power, the angels and their song stands for purity. This whole scene comes together to reveal God’s glorious PERFECTION: “the whole earth is full of his glory!”

1. **See God’s Glorious PERFECTION**

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is **full of his glory**.” Isaiah 6:3

The Lord reigns supreme. He is PERFECT in power, love and purity. He is perfect in EVERY WAY. When we say “God is good” we mean that He is SUPREMELY GOOD. He defines what is good in the essence of His very nature.

A pastor friend of mine articulated the 13 virtues of Christ:

1. **See God’s Glorious PERFECTION**

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is **full of his glory**.” Isaiah 6:3

* Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Generosity, Goodness, Faithfulness
* Gentleness, Discipline, Wisdom, Hope, Humility and Zeal

Jesus embodied every perfection of God - humbling Himself as the Almighty Creator of all things into a limited and fragile human body but maintaining His divine attributes.

When we see the glory of God, we have the same reaction as Isaiah - we realize how utterly sinful we are. When we see the perfections of God we become painfully aware of our imperfections.

Do you know someone who keeps a pristine house? Never a speck of dust anywhere; carpets and tile areas always immaculate. Not even so much as a water spot on a single glass. Imagine you were working in this person’s yard and your feet were all muddy, your hands filthy. If you stepped into that sparkling clean house in that state of filthiness you would feel both exposed and out of place.

That is how we are before our holy God.

1. **See God’s Glory**

“And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, ‘Woe is me! For I am lost.’” Isaiah 6:4-5

To see the glory and holiness of God is to be UNDONE before Him. It is to say, “Woe is me!” The modern equivalent of that is ***“I’m toast.”*** But once we recognize our contaminated condition we are positioned to experience God’s grace!

1. **Experience God’s Grace**

“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.” Isaiah 6:5

* Recognize your **Condition**

In the light of God’s perfect holiness our true condition is exposed - we are all sinners deserving nothing from God but His condemnation. Isaiah - ***the PROPHET OF GOD*** - feels uniquely exposed in the area of his SPEECH. The one whose career was focused on speech realized that even his best efforts were contaminated.

And if the prophet had unclean lips, how much more did the PEOPLE have unclean lips. Jesus said, ***“out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”*** What comes out of our mouths reveals what is in our hearts. If you curse at someone who cuts you off in traffic or swear when you get eliminated in Fortnite - the problem was not what happened to you, the problem was in your heart. The situation just showed you what was already going on inside - it let the anger out.

We are a people of unclean lips. ***And we live in a culture of unclean lips.*** Think how easily and thoughtlessly people misuse the name of God. To use God’s name as an exclamation… to use the name of Jesus as a curse… this is serious blasphemy and a direct violation of the third commandment.

***But unclean lips are just a symptom of unclean hearts.*** It’s not the words people use that are the problem, it’s the selfish, sinful hearts that produce those words that are the real problem. And this is what the light of God’s glory reveals: it shines right through our shiny exterior to expose the reality in our hearts. We are unclean sinners - unholy, unrighteous, unloving, unfaithful. Everything God is we are not - at least not nearly to His standards.

But when we begin to recognize the truth of our condition we are in position to experience God’s grace. One of the angels picked up a burning coal from the altar, flew to Isaiah:

1. **Experience God’s Grace**

“And he touched my mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; ***your guilt is taken away***, and your sin is atoned for.’” Isaiah 6:6-7

* Receive **Cleansing** in Christ

Isaiah cried out his confession of sin. Hearing this confession, God sent a servant to wash away Isaiah’s sin. Listen to these powerful words: “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is atoned for.”

If you have confessed your sins to Jesus - if you have called on Jesus to forgive you and save you, then **JESUS HIMSELF says these words to you**: “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

***The coal from the altar is a symbol of the purifying work of God through a sacrifice***. The altar was the place where animals were slaughtered to make atonement. The altar in front of the Temple, the book of Hebrews tells us, was just a shadow of the REAL altar in the throne room of God (Heb. 8:5). Isaiah caught a glimpse of that REAL altar. He felt the sizzling touch of the burning coal on his lips. Even the angel had to use tongs to pick up that coal. We can imagine what it felt like when that coal touched his lips.

You wonder if, after this vision, Isaiah shook himself and touched his lips to see if they were permanently damaged by the burn.

But right here is **the gospel picture**. Isaiah was not burned by this coal any more than he was burned up on the altar. Jesus - our true and great high priest - presented himself before the altar of God in heaven. He laid down his body on that altar as a sacrifice for your sin and mine. The knife of God’s judgment fell on him. The fire of God’s wrath consumed him. While his physical body was dying on a Roman cross on earth, Jesus’ was being burned up on this altar in heaven that Isaiah glimpsed in his vision. The perfect Lamb of God allowed His human body to be burned up on those blazing hot coals of God’s justice.

***He was burned by those coals so you and I could be purified.*** The coal touched Isaiah’s lips and his guilt was taken away, his sins atoned for. The coal did not burn him, it cleansed him. How? Because Messiah was coming to die on that altar. Come back next week to hear about the suffering servant Isaiah foresaw and believed in.

**This is how we respond to the holiness of God**. First, we have to see His glorious power, purity and perfection. Then, in the light of that glory we recognize our true sinful condition and fall down before Jesus, begging Him to forgive us and wash away our guilt and sin. Entirely as a gift of His grace, Jesus promises to do this very thing.

**Receive Cleansing in Christ**

“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf... He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages **to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**.” Hebrews 9:24,26

When a sinner comes to Jesus in faith and calls on Him, this is what Jesus does. He REMOVES your sin. ***He takes it away from you and places it upon HIMSELF***. Throughout Israel’s history they offered thousands upon thousands of sacrifices - over and over again acting out the drama of atonement to illustrate the holiness of God and the great cost of atoning for sin. But Jesus did not have to be sacrificed over and over.

The Glorious Creator of All Things - the One who reigns supreme in power, who exists in perfect purity and who reveals every perfection - Jesus the King of Kings laid down His life as the perfect, once for all sacrifice for sin. Do you see the Glory of God in this? Do you feel the blinding light of this mercy? **THE HOLY ONE was covered with sin.** The Almighty One yielded Himself into death. The All Glorious King surrendered all of his power, all of his rights. As he stretched out his hands on the cross he laid down his life on the altar of God’s perfect justice.

The coals of blazing fury that consumed Jesus in Justice are ***available to us right now to cleanse us from our sins***.

And here is the truly amazing thing. When you come to Jesus in faith He not only takes away your sin and guilt, he covers you in His perfect holiness. Jesus takes your sin-saturated clothing and gives you His **radiant robes of righteousness**.

Jesus takes your sin and gives you HOLINESS. This vision of God on His throne in heaven - seated on a throne, exalted in glory, power and purity - this is the reality for the believer in Jesus: we not only receive cleansing in Christ, we:

**Receive RIGHTEOUSNESS in Christ**

“For those God foreknew he also predestined ***to be conformed to the image of his Son***... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, **he also justified**; those he justified, he also glorified.” Romans 8:29-30 NIV

God CHOSE YOU, before the creation of the world, to be conformed to the image of Jesus. He called you to be shaped and molded to BE LIKE JESUS. To accomplish this, he JUSTIFIED you. That is the verbal form of the noun righteousness. When you call on Jesus in faith he RIGHTEOUS-ifies you. He declares you to be righteous.

Before you were conceived, Jesus called you into being. He named you and decided the life you would have.

At the moment you trusted in ***Jesus he called you RIGHTEOUS***. He declared this truth INTO YOU. “Your guilt is taken away, your sin atoned for. AND my holiness is yours. My righteousness is yours. My Spirit is YOURS. I am yours,” Jesus said to you. He spoke this INTO YOU just as He spoke this universe into being with a word of declarative POWER.

The Catholic church calls this doctrine of IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS **“a legal fiction.”** How could God declare us righteous when He knows better than anyone that we are NOT righteous. They say it’s a “legal fiction.” But in truth it is not a legal fiction it is a **SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION**. The Bible calls it being “born again.” At the moment of saving faith Jesus took your sin and gave you His righteousness. He took your cold, dead heart of stone and gave you a new heart of flesh. He took your old sinful self - your flesh - into his body on the cross so it could DIE with Him and be buried with Him. And then He brought you to life through His resurrection as a NEW CREATION.

This is no legal fiction this is the great revelation of the Gospel! In Christ we are forgiven. In Christ we are free. In Christ we are alive! In Christ we ARE RIGHTEOUS.

Once you see the Holiness of God you will despair until you see the grace of God to you in Jesus. Then you will REJOICE with an unparalleled joy.

One more step in responding to God’s holiness:

1. **Commit to God’s Mission**

“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.’” Isaiah 6:8

Salvation is not a two step process in which you first accept Jesus as Savior and later, eventually, accept Him as Lord. **Jesus is both Savior and Lord.** You cannot have him as Savior without committing to Him as Lord. You have to first see the truth of God’s Glory in the face of Christ. JESUS is the All-Glorious, All-Sovereign, All-Righteous Son of God. In truth, you don’t accept Him at all, **you plead with Him to accept you**.

And, miraculously, He will. ***He will accept you not only into His family but into His very being***. To become a Christian is to BE IN CHRIST. You let your old self, your old identity die so you can become a new person in Christ.

Just as God called Isaiah to a life on mission, so ***He calls every one of us to leave behind our petty ambitions for this world*** and devote ourselves to His purposes and His plans.

***Have you heard the voice of the Lord calling you?*** Have you stepped forward like Isaiah to say, “Here I am! Send me”? Or have you stepped back into the shadows, lowering your eyes and hoping the teacher didn’t actually call on you and maybe will look the other way…?

To believe in Jesus is to commit to His mission. To follow Jesus is to follow Him to the ends of the earth. Because Jesus’ mission is clear: He is calling out disciples to follow him from every tongue and tribe and nation. And He is using us as His servants to accomplish this mission. Here are the three steps to committing to God’s Mission:

“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.’” Isaiah 6:8

1. Hear God’s Call
2. Present Yourself to Him
3. Proclaim His Glory and Grace

Once you hear God calling you, the only response is that of Isaiah: “Here I am! Send me.” Romans 12:1 says ***we present ourselves to God as a LIVING SACRIFICE***. We lay our lives down on the altar just as Jesus laid down His life for us. A sacrifice on the altar has no rights, no power, no control. We lay back our necks, inviting the knife of God to slay any part of us that we need to DENY OURSELVES, take up our cross and follow Jesus.

And then, as those who belong to Jesus and are devoted to His mission, we live our lives as Isaiah did to proclaim the glory and grace of God that we have experienced.

It really is as simple as that. What has God done for you? What has He done in your life? That is your message to share. This summer we want to challenge everyone at Oakwood to prepare a 2-3 minute selfie video to share your story of grace. We’ll show some examples of what we mean and give you some resources to help describe your life before Jesus, how you met Jesus and how you are different now.

Your testimony is one of your most powerful resources. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord in the holy Temple. The prophet was marked by that for the rest of his life.

Peter was a fisherman who let a Rabbi into his boat and agreed to let his nets down for a catch even though they hadn’t caught anything all night. The nets came up so full they nearly burst.

“And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’” Luke 5:7-8

Peter responded to a boatload of fish in the very same way Isaiah responded to a vision of God in His temple. For the ancient Jewish prophet, God spoke the language he understood. For the first century fisherman, Jesus spoke the language he understood. How did God come to you? How did He call your name? How did you see the glory of God, experience the grace of God and commit to the mission of God? What’s your story? Let’s practice telling those stories this summer!

Let’s pray and then we’ll sing about the HOLINESS of our matchless Savior!

***HOLY HOLY HOLY***