

Title: Holy, Holy, Holy
Text: Isaiah 6.1-13
Theme: The holiness of God
Series: Isaiah #9
Prop Stmtnt: What happens on earth is driven by what happens with God.
Aim: I want my people to surrender themselves to God, for whatever path he chooses for them and to be willing to be faithful, no matter what.

“Heaven is for Real” is a New York Times bestseller about a 3-yr old boy who believes that he went to heaven during surgery and tells about it. I’ve read parts of it, and it is obvious that he, and certainly his parents really believe this happened. Hence the title, “Heaven is for real.” It is another account of an afterlife experience that supposedly validates the Bible. In terms of a book, there are worse things you can read, but in terms of understanding heaven, it is not helpful. Why do I say that? Books like this place a person’s experience over the Scriptures so you now interpret the text in view of the experience instead of the experience in view of the text. In a chapter titled, “The Throne Room of God” this boy recounts his vision of God, but it is not like Isaiah’s, Daniel’s, or John’s. The little boy’s vision is softer, gentler. In his experience he gets a chair and gets to sit near God. But when Isaiah, Daniel and John saw the throne room, they feared for their lives. The view of God presented in this book appeals to us. A true view of God as presented in Isaiah 6 causes us to tremble. We have become very comfortable and very casual with a convenient, easy-going God. Tragically, we are not familiar with God. Perhaps that is why 3 million books have been sold, while Isaiah was virtually ignored.

Read Text:

Isaiah’s vision of God is introduced with, “In the year that King Uzziah died”. Uzziah was one of the more effective kings of Judah. The Assyrians were not aggressive at the time, so the southern kingdom (led by Uzziah) was able to enjoy peace and as a result, prosperity and he became so proud that he attempted to usurp the role of a priest on one occasion and he was struck with leprosy. For 10 years he was the diseased, secluded king, while his son Jotham was the public king. It was co-regency. It was pretty embarrassing to have a king who was also a leper. After Uzziah died, Jotham only lived 5 years until Ahaz took over, whom we meet in the next chapter. Uzziah’s death (740 BC) marked the end of an era. Five years later Tiglath-Pileaser takes over the Assyrian empire. Things were about to get bad for Judah, really bad and Isaiah had a front row seat. But, before this happens, God shows Isaiah something that others do not see. God shows Isaiah a vision of himself. We are going to see that this vision of God is what God used to commission Isaiah and send him to pursue his impossible mission. Earthly kings are flawed, diseased and die. The real King rules flawlessly - forever. Isaiah is commissioned in this chapter, and Isaiah becomes a paradigm. He becomes an illustration that helps us see how a major tension is going to be resolved. That tension is reflected in the two themes that have been presented in the introduction. 1) The people of God are so rebellious and sinful, and have become such a stench to God, that he must, for the integrity of his word, judge them. But, if he judges them, then 2) how can they become the people that will bless the world? How can they be the people who are at ground zero

of the Kingdom of God on the earth? In other words, how can God use a people who, because of their sin deserve to be destroyed? This question is set aside for now and replaced with a more personal one. How can God use a prophet, who because of his sin, deserves to be destroyed? What happens to Isaiah becomes a pattern for all who would dare live for God. And what happens to Isaiah in this vision will mark his life, his preaching, his writings, and his obedience for the rest of his days. It is Isaiah that his overwhelmed with the glory of God and the rest of this book breathes out that celestial air. Isaiah becomes a prophet who not only speaks God's word, but becomes consumed with a passion for the glory of God. Before you can understand that he saves, you must grasp the reality that he is terrifying in holiness and we are deserving of his terror.

1. **How do you see God?** (1-4)

A. **Do you see him for who He really is?**

1. Sovereign – *the Lord* (adonai) speaks of authority
2. Seated, on the throne –

This is the very heart of his vision. We learned about the tabernacle in Exodus. From Hebrews we saw that it was a replica of the heavenly temple. Only the high priest could go into the holy of holies because the Ark of the Covenant was there. The top of the ark was called the “mercy seat.” God ruled his people from his throne in the tabernacle. But, no one could go in there and live, except the high priest. As awesome as that was, and it was, the tabernacle was a replica of the heavenly temple, into which Isaiah is ushered and he sees the heavenly throne. The sights and sounds and perhaps smells (smoke) are overwhelming. To see this, is to see terror. He goes on...

3. Exalted (high and lifted up)

The throne is large and towers over everything. The picture reveals the absolute absurdity of every person who dares to exalt himself, who dares to mock God, who dares, to defy him. These little peons, who at the height of their boasting, are not even worth measuring in view of his grandeur.

4. Majestic (robe filled the temple – king/priest)

But wait a second! What is missing from this vision? Isaiah does not describe God, he can only speak of his robe. Now, what he says of his robe is obviously impressive. His robe is so large, that it fills the temple. What is the point? God is wearing a robe and God is so purely, inherently majestic that he fills the temple, but Isaiah cannot find the words to sufficiently describe what that looks like so he speaks of the robe. There is a line, a barrier between the Creator and the creation that we cannot cross. There is a barrier in our understanding, experience, even vocabulary that can adequately capture him. But, even here, this vision is already replete with imagery we do not fully understand until the New

Testament. What kind of a king rules from a temple? What kind of a king is also a priest? At this point, those questions are not answered, but in Christ, they will be!

5. Awesome (seraphim covered, flying, speaking)

But there are others in this throne room. These are angelic beings named as seraphim, which means “burning ones.” Isaiah says that they have a face, feet, and wings; six of them actually. They use two of their wings to cover their faces, because even these burning ones cannot stand without cover in the presence of God. They cover their feet in respect and fear. We are curious to know more about their appearance, but he does not say, perhaps because their brilliance blinds him from seeing anything more of them. They are standing above God, which I take to mean that they surround him, like an antiphonal choir positioned from two balconies.

6. Worshiped

And one calls to another and says, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” In Revelation 4, the apostle John is also given the opportunity to look behind the curtain of eternity into the throne room of God. He speaks of what he calls the “living creatures” who have 6 wings, who also say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty” (equivalent to the LORD of hosts). Who is this God who is so utterly different than anything the creation can imagine that angelic beings are designed to do nothing but declare his holiness for eternity? Even these undefiled beings cover their faces, and cover their feet because while they are without sin, they are not infinitely holy, like God is. But, what are they doing? They are calling to one another. Since their words are set in a poetic structure, I believe that it is right to assume that they were singing to each other. They are declaring to one another how holy God is. They do it in fear, but their singing speaks also of great delight. And that, I believe is one of the greatest pictures of worship that the Bible gives to us. Worship is not a casual, whatever ordeal. Your eternal delight, your complete satisfaction, your captured attention, captured affection, full-throated, whole being proclamation is the necessary, logical and yet still inadequate response to God. What do you imagine the angels think of the worship that you offer God? Surely, they must think that we are worshiping another god, since we hold back our affections, and hold back our offerings, and hold back our service, and hold back our devotion, and hold back our praise. If you do not offer utter devotion to God, then what are you holding it out for? Unbridled holiness demands complete worship! Look at verse 4. “*And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.*” Who is speaking? It is the seraphim! The seraphim is praising God, delighting in God, extolling God and declaring the holiness of God to the others so loudly, that the foundations of the thresholds shake at the volume of his song. Smoke rises, perhaps from incense that only adds to the mystery and the reality that you cannot look at God through unveiled eyes. This is overwhelming. Infinite holiness demands a thunderous response. But what is holiness?

7. Holy

Whenever something is repeated in the Hebrew language, it is akin to underlining it, capitalizing it, and using a big bold font. For something to be repeated three times, like the word, “holy” is to place this in a category all of its own. And that is very fitting, since “holy” means set apart for a special use. We are called to be holy (set apart, unlike this world) like God. In order to be that you must recognize the absolute uniqueness of God. He is infinitely righteous. There is not one spot or hint of injustice, or moral weakness with him. His purity is so far beyond us that it blazes as a fire and threatens to annihilate any sinner in his presence. There is no compromise with his righteousness and that is devastating to us. He does not change! He is too pure to be able to see evil and not respond. We, on the other hand are like the proverbial frog in the kettle. We get used to the slouching of our culture toward Gomorrah. We tolerate lyrics in songs, scenes in movies, jokes from our friends, innuendos in our own speech, even vulgar language because our entire culture reeks with gutter fumes of moral decay. But God does not change. Holiness is not a puritan ideal from a by-gone era. It is the very essence of our God. “Holiness is God's hidden glory; glory is God's all present holiness.” (Motyer)

8. Powerful – *the LORD of hosts*

Power is pursued in many ways. Some people attempt to gain it by the way they dress, or through actual physical strength. Some attempt to gain power by accumulating money, or acquiring a political office. But the very essence of power is not seen in any of those. Have you ever been in the presence of a person who “walks with God”? The “otherness” of their life brings about the exposure of your self, in contrast to them and it is intimidating beyond words. God not only has raw power by virtue of his strength, but the very essence of his power is rooted in his absolute purity that demands allegiance.

9. Global – *“the whole earth is full of his glory”*

Now, why would this matter, particularly to Isaiah and his audience? This God is not merely the local deity of the Jews. It is not as if the Jews have their God, the Syrians have their gods, the Assyrians have their gods, we all have our own gods – can’t we just get along sort of thing. Oh no! This is the one, the only, the absolute and forever, God! Do you see him for who He is? Or...

A. **Do you see him how you prefer?**

This is not the view that most have of God. Most want a God that they can make in their image who exists to make life comfortable, convenient and help smooth things over. Contemporary Christianity has a great deal of show, but little repentance and personal holiness. The God we preach is not one these seraphim know. Your view of God is seen in how you answer these questions: Do you justify your indulgences and your habits? Do you make excuses for your sin and look for the failures of others as cover for yourself? Do you console yourself as you plan to sin that you can always ask forgiveness?

2. **How do you see yourself?** (5a) – *“Woe is me. For I am lost”*

Isaiah knew too well, how fragile and vulnerable his country was, now that Uzziah had died. He knew that Assyria had awakened and her forces would be pillaging through the land, but in this moment, all that was happening on earth was not his concern. His concern was himself. For now, after seeing God, he realized that was not only fundamentally sinful, but now, loaded with a profound sense of guilt, and an awareness of his own personal, deeply personal and fundamental moral pollution, Isaiah feared that he was going to die. He had no reason to think otherwise. Isaiah feels his condition. He is lost. He cannot join the seraphim and sing. He is not a burning one like them. He cannot stand here before the devastatingly penetrating gaze of God. He has no where to hide, no where to run. So, now that his sin has been revealed and expecting to be consumed he cries out, "Woe is me! For I am lost!" These are the words of despair. And this is exactly what we need to understand ourselves. We have nothing to bargain with before God. What is more, humanly speaking, there is nothing that can stand before us and protect us from his devastating holiness. How do you see yourself? Cool? Sophisticated? In charge? Or, as you are: lost, undone, in need?

3. **How do you see others?** (5b) "*people of unclean lips*"

Isaiah then begins to realize Judah's problem. It is not the change of a king, the rise of the Assyrians, the economy, or natural disasters. Judah, (and us) is accountable to the LORD of hosts and this is dreadful. For here are all of these people, whose contempt for God, gutter language, caustic speech, haughty lives are not only seen, but they are seen by the LORD of hosts who is holy and Isaiah, who may have been tempted to be angry with his people, now identifies with them feels shame and despair, even though they don't. He knows what this means and they remain in willful ignorance. Beloved, the word of God is a delight and a weight. You know the joy that his Word can bring for your soul, but the reality is, we live in a world that is full of people who reject God and we fear for them.

3. **What hope is there for you?** (6-7)

Isaiah has nothing to hide behind and nothing to offer for atonement. But what happens reveals an essential and eternal tenet for all people, for all time. Atonement for your sin does not come from you. Atonement, the appeasing of God for your sin, can only come from outside of you. And this is seen in the angel taking a burning coal, and touching the lips of Isaiah. Isaiah cannot do a thing but receive it! The burning coal comes from the altar that points to sacrifice. Sacrifice is necessary to atone for sin. You cannot have a relationship with God apart from sacrifice. But, your sacrifice is not acceptable. Whatever you offer only makes it worse. Your sacrifice is polluted. You need a pure and perfect (burning) sacrifice. This, of course, is a foreshadow of Christ. The seraphim speaks and what he says, is almost as instructive as what is not said. The seraphim did not try to pacify Isaiah by easing his guilt. He did not point to others who were worse and tell him that everyone knows that deep down he has a good heart. He doesn't tell him that he is being too hard on himself. No, the seraphim agrees and speaks of his guilt. Not only must atonement come from outside of you, but you must acknowledge your condition. That is not how the gospel is often presented. People are given the idea that while you are good, you are just not good enough. You need a little help getting over the gap. That is

patently false. We are lost. We are undone. We are hopeless and are in complete need. And that is what is so incredibly awesome about this scene. This God whose very essence condemns and could destroy the sinner, is the same God who provides the means by which our sin is atoned. Only God can save you from God. Did Isaiah realize that his only hope was Judah's only hope?

4. **What is your calling?** (8)

Up until this point, God has not spoken. Now, he speaks. And what does he say? “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Obvious reference to the Trinity) Do you get the point? Worship does not exist for the worshipper to be lost in ecstasy and wonder. Worship gives birth to service. In fact, serving is driven by worship. If worship does not result in confession, atonement, commissioning and service, then whatever else it is, it isn't worship! How does God measure the validity and quality of our worship? It is not because you get goose bumps. It is because you confess and repent of your sin, love God and his gospel and serve his church instead of yourself. It is when we weep because we cannot give more funds, and more energy for the sake of the gospel. It is when we pray earnestly that God will use us to speak the gospel and use our children all over the world for the sake of his name. But you are not ready to serve until you realize that there is nothing more urgent than answering God's call. Do not serve because you are doing the church a favor, or doing God a favor. Serve because you recognize that you owe God your very life and that you desire from your heart to make him known – no matter what. When you realize that this infinitely holy God has every right to consume you in judgment, but has instead taken your judgment for you, then you don't care what he calls you to do, you are ready! Are you?

5. **Are you willing to do it?** (9-13)

Plenty of missionary sermons end at verse eight. I can understand why because the rest of this chapter is a bit unsettling, yet necessary to grasp. God tells Isaiah what to preach (9) and at the same time informs him that the more he preaches the more rebellious the people are going to be. Their pride and obstinacy is rooted so deep, that they will twist everything that you say. The more clearly you explain it, the greater their judgment will be. Isaiah, if you are faithful to preach my message you will be a failure in the eyes of these people. Are you willing to do this? Isaiah's response (11) is understandable, “How long?” And God says, until the land is destroyed and my judgment is carried out. Isaiah is distraught. He is called by God and is determined to be faithful to this calling, but it comes with a heavy heart and with great cost. Would you be willing to do that? Would you be willing to give your son or daughter to that? Are you willing to be a failure in the eyes of the world in order to be faithful in the eyes of God? Isaiah knew that if he altered the truth and made it easier for the people then maybe he would draw a larger crowd and be more “successful”. But to do that would be devastating. Not only would the people be confirmed in their rebellion, but Isaiah would be selling out the future generations to lies. God made it clear, that this generation was lost, but yet, his plan would go on. We will see this over and over in Isaiah. Hope is the unexpected frame around the painting of doom. Even after judgment left nothing but smoldering stumps, deep inside the stump

was a holy seed. Isaiah, preach for them. Cornerstone, do you realize that you are part of that holy seed? Do you realize what has been bequeathed to you? If we squander the truth by our failure to live in submission to God, like Judah, we would invite God's judgment. If we take it to heart, we then stand with Isaiah and say, your vision, is our vision. Your God is the God, and our God.