

This concluding sermon in the series on the attributes of God is on God's holiness. There is perhaps no better passage addressing this attribute than Isaiah chapter six. King Uzziah had just died. Isaiah went to the Temple to pray and perhaps to seek God for the future of the nation. There he had a revelation that changed his perception of God and of himself.

As Isaiah stood in prayer, probably in front of the altar of God, what he saw before Him suddenly changed. He was seeing into the spiritual realm. Before him was the very throne of God, the heavenly mercy seat, of which the one in the earthly Temple was just a shadow. He was not allowed to go before the earthly shadow, but suddenly he was before the reality in heaven. He wrote, 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 (ESV)

God is a spirit and does not have a physical body (John 4:24), but God the Son is the physical manifestation of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). This was Jesus in all His glory that Isaiah was seeing. The glorified Christ is above all that surround the throne. To be elevated above others is representative of authority. To be "lifted up" also means to be exalted (Psalm 27:6) Isaiah has a sense of smallness in the presence of the Lord.

The "train of His robe" is His glory. Just as the glory of God filled the Temple when Solomon dedicated the earthly Temple, so the Lord's glory always fills the heavenly reality. The outshining of the perfect attributes of God are manifest in brilliance that we call glory (Psalm 29:2).

² *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 From Ezekiel's and John's visions of this same setting, we know there are four seraphs. The word means "to burn." They are probably the same as cherubs, not cute little babies with tiny wings, but magnificent beings that appear like flames of fire (2 Kings 19:15). Each has four faces and six wings (Ezekiel 10:14).

They cover their face that is toward the throne, because even they cannot behold the full glory of the Lord. They use two wings to fly about the throne. There is a sense of impenetrability, for a form of the word "seraph" is also used in words for consuming and sacrificial fire (Leviticus 4:12). They cover their feet with two wings.

³ *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 The Lord created these beings to see and declare His glory. Their vocal chords were created for that very purpose. They cry out the triple "holy", which is why we are looking at this passage to consider the holiness of God. In

Commented [PW1]: John 4:24 (NIV)
²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Commented [PW2]: Colossians 1:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Commented [PW3]: Psalm 27:6 (ESV)
⁶ And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

Commented [PW4]: Psalm 29:2 (ESV)
² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

Commented [PW5]: 2 Kings 19:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: "O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.

Commented [PW6]: Ezekiel 10:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was a human face, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

Commented [PW7]: Leviticus 4:12 (ESV)
¹² all the rest of the bull—he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and shall burn it up on a fire of wood. On the ash heap it shall be burned up.

Hebrew, the repetition of a word intensifies the meaning. It is the ultimate expression of the Word. No other attribute is repeated in this manner. We never read of love, love, love or righteous, righteous, righteous. Though these are perfect attributes, the angels around the throne are, above all else, in awe of God's holiness.

The Lord is the ultimate of holiness. He is called YHWH here. For the use of this name in reference to Jesus, read my book *Divine Messiah?* He is called YHWH Tsebaah, the Lord of the angel armies or God Almighty. The word "holy" applied to God also speaks of His omnipotence. Thankfully, this power is in the hands of the One who is the very definition of goodness.

The word "holy" is rich in meaning. As applied to God, it means set apart. He is the Creator. There is none like Him. He is not one of many, as Mormonism and Hinduism suggest. He alone is holy in this sense! He is transcendent. He is above all created things.

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
Romans 11:36

The Hebrew word "qadosh" that is translated into our word "holy" means to be pure and separated from evil. Anything that is dedicated to God and for His sacred use alone, whether instruments or people, can be referred to as holy. But He alone is "holy, holy, holy."

When one of the faces of the seraphs look at the earth, they see it filled with the glory of God (Psalm 72:19). They see His perfect grace and justice exercised throughout the world. They see His love and righteousness expressed perfectly throughout the planet. In billions of lives, they see the wonder of God drawing souls from darkness to the light. They see soul after soul sanctified by the work of Jesus work on the cross and are awestruck. Their response to the wonder of what they are enabled to see is to cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory!"

Picture the repetition of these magnificent beings looking into the earth and seeing illustration after illustration of God orchestrating situations that illustrate His beneficence that brings Him glory and displays His goodness. Overwhelmed by what they see and wondering how He could do it again and again, they can't help but express it, "Holy, holy, holy!" God is transcendent, above and over all things, but He is imminent, near to each of us, working in every life to bring us to Him and bless us with His grace and love (Deuteronomy 30:14).

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. Isaiah 6:4 These are somewhat frightening beings with awesome power whose voices can shake a foundation. I think we would be trembling in terror if we witnessed this.

God had the Israelites put huge gold covered cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18). Images of them were woven into the curtains that divided off the rooms

Commented [PW8]: Psalm 72:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!

Commented [PW9]: Deuteronomy 30:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

Commented [PW10]: Exodus 25:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat.

of the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:1). They were like huge caution signs. They declared that the location was holy and therefore dangerous. God's purity will not be compromised. If that which is impure comes before Him it will be instantly dealt with. **The holiness of God should evoke a reverential fear in us.**

We are mere creatures in a fallen world. It is only in Christ that we can boldly come to the throne of grace to find help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). Our boldness is not based on anything in us, but in the perfect redemption Jesus purchased for us. Our righteousness is of Him (Isaiah 45:24-25). At the same time, we should fear walking in the flesh and being dealt with by our heavenly Father who disciplines the ones He loves (Hebrews 12:7).

"The house was filled with smoke," reminds us of the smoke of incense from the altar of incense. When the High Priest would prepare to enter the Holy of Holies once a year, He would first fill it with the smoke. It was a representation of the grace and mercy of God responding to prayer that comes between His holy righteous presence and man's sinful condition. Mercy was present so that Isaiah was not consumed (Leviticus 16:13).

5 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!" Isaiah 6:5 The Israelites believed that to see God would be the end of one's life (Exodus 33:20). Our carnal beings could not handle a full display of the glory of God. Even in the presence of angels, men find themselves drained of all their strength and in need of help (Daniel 8:18). When the Bible speaks of Moses knowing God face to face it is referring to a personal relationship (Deuteronomy 34:10). The little bit of glory that Moses saw, made his face glow (Exodus 33:22-23). It is no wonder Isaiah thought his life was over.

He cried out, "Woe is me!" If you scan the book of Isaiah, you'll see that in the first five chapters there are more woes than in the next 60 chapters! Isaiah had been proclaiming the word of the Lord, but he has not had a revelation of God's holiness. His previous state was all about others and their shortcomings. He couldn't see that he was just as in need of God's grace. In chapters one through five Isaiah prophesied woe to those who are brazen, wicked, drunkards, greedy, and those who distort truth. He can see what is wrong with everyone else. Woe to you! But when he sees God, he declares, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips..."

The people were still wicked, but now Isaiah sees his own sin. Isaiah has been declaring the Word of the Lord in the first chapters, but he was accusing others without looking at his own need of the grace of God. **The messenger needed to hear the message.** There before the holiness of God every wicked thought, every self-righteous word, and his prideful attitude appeared as filthiness before a holy and utterly pure God. He was "lost," which is also translated "undone," or "unraveled," before God's holiness. Holiness exposes sin for what it is.

Commented [PW11]: Exodus 26:1 (ESV)

¹ "Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them.

Commented [PW12]: Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Commented [PW13]: Isaiah 45:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ "Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him.

²⁵ In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory."

Commented [PW14]: Hebrews 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Commented [PW15]: Leviticus 16:13 (ESV)

¹³ and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.

Commented [PW16]: Exodus 33:20 (ESV)

²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."

Commented [PW17]: Daniel 8:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And when he had spoken to me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face to the ground. But he touched me and made me stand up.

Commented [PW18]: Deuteronomy 34:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,

Commented [PW19]: Exodus 33:22-23 (ESV)

²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.

²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Can we pause for a moment and consider our own condition before the Holy One of Israel. That was a name frequently used in Scripture to refer to the God we serve, The Holy One of Israel (2 Kings 19:22). Close your eyes and try to see this scene and consider how much we need that smoke of grace to fill the Temple. He knows our every thought. He knows all that we have done. He knows our times of murmuring and ingratitude, even rebellion (Hebrews 4:13). How we need to be clothed in Christ!

I'm reminded of the pearl of the Psalms, number 84. As the worshiper approaches the altar he cries out, "Look upon our shield O God. Look with favor on Your anointed One." Psalm 84:9 (NIV) Don't look at me. Look at Jesus. He is our shield, our righteousness, our only hope of coming before a holy God.

Isaiah was most convicted about the things that he had uttered. It is out of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Things he had said revealed the pride of his heart. What about us? I think we can all say with Isaiah, "I am a person of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips."

It is in recognizing our true condition and looking inward instead of at the sins of others that we see that it is we who are in need of atonement. ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." Isaiah 6:6-7 That could only happen because Jesus would one day pay the just penalty for his sins (1 John 2:2).

This is quite a graphic image. The glowing coal would cause the water in the flesh to hiss and emit the smell of burnt flesh from this most sensitive of skin. It is an image that is meant to remind us how difficult it is to tame the tongue (James 3:8). The searing must go to the heart or the lips will continue to be unclean before a holy God.

God had been using Isaiah to prophecy, but now Isaiah is ready to be a witness. ⁸ 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 After God shows us our own need for atonement, we are in a position to hear His call. When we have a revelation of the holiness of God, we see the contrast with our own lives. It's easy to look for sin in others or feel we are pretty good because we don't do what someone else does. But when we encounter God's holiness, we see we are just like all those we've been accusing of falling short (Romans 3:23).

God calls us to be holy because He is holy, not in His uniquely transcendent way, but in our behavior. Peter wrote, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16 When we are in Christ, our lips should be seared like Isaiah's were. Our sins are atoned for, and we have the risen Christ living in us to help us be holy in all our conduct. We will fall short,

Commented [PW20]: 2 Kings 19:22 (ESV)

²² "Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights? Against the Holy One of Israel!"

Commented [PW21]: Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Commented [PW22]: Matthew 12:34 (ESV)

³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Commented [PW23]: 1 John 2:2 (ESV)

² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Commented [PW24]: James 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Commented [PW25]: Romans 3:23 (ESV)

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

but we get back up, confess our sin, and go forward knowing that sin is covered (1 John 1:9) We are growing in Christ likeness.

Holiness, in the sense of purity, is one of the communicable attributes of God. In other words it is one of the qualities of God that Christians are to exhibit. That doesn't mean a stuffy do-gooder kind of life that is isolated from the world. It should be like Jesus who demonstrated it for us, a friend of sinners but pure in all that we do and say (Luke 15:2). It is a work of the Holy Spirit in and through us as we mature through reading the Word and fellowshiping with God in prayer.

This is when we can say, "Send me." God has dealt with our sins, we've been humbled, and we know how dependent we are on God for everything. We realize that our service is only because of His enabling power and grace. Are you ready to say, "Send me?"

Holiness, like the other attributes of God, works together with all the attributes. Every attribute is holy (Psalm 103:1). It is pure. God's motives in expressing each attribute are pure. There is no selfishness or impurity. His love is holy. His justice is holy. All that He thinks and does is holy. The seraphim have it right when they cry out, "Holy, holy, holy."

In the very first song recorded in Scripture, Moses was the first to call God holy. ¹¹ *"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"* Exodus 15:11 God was holy in judging the false gods of Egypt. He was holy in honoring His promise to Abraham by setting Israel free. He was holy in destroying the stubborn and rebellious army of Pharaoh in the sea. He was holy in leading the people by a cloud by day and fire by night. We could go through the entire history of Israel and see how God was holy in all that He said and did.

He is majestic in holiness. That means His holiness is His very right to rule and reign. ² *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* ³ *And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.* 1 John 3:2 Jesus has made us pure before the eyes of God, but we must work it out, relying on Him moment by moment (Philippians 2:12).

Jesus exemplified this attribute just as He did all the other attributes of God. He was holy in all that He said and did. He was holy in the gentle and gracious way He responded to others. He was holy in always doing the will of His Father (John 8:29). He was so holy that He could challenge anyone to point out some sin in His life (John 8:46). Paul wrote that the resurrection of Jesus was a declaration that He was indeed the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness (Romans 1:4).

You may wonder if the heavenly scene ever changes. Are those seraphim still in awe? Almost 800 years after Isaiah, John experienced something similar to Isaiah. He saw the throne of God. Here is his description. ⁸ *And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to*

Commented [PW26]: 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Commented [PW27]: Luke 15:2 (ESV)

² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Commented [PW28]: Psalm 103:1 (ESV)

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Commented [PW29]: Philippians 2:12 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

Commented [PW30]: John 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

Commented [PW31]: John 8:46 (ESV)

⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

Commented [PW32]: Romans 1:4 (ESV)

⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

Revelation 4:8 The reason for their cry of the triple holy was the immutability of God. His unchanging perfection evoked the thrice holy song. The attribute they will praise throughout eternity is the holiness of God. The foundation of the threshold is shaking even now!

I wonder how much we value this attribute of which these beings can't stop singing. Perhaps we need a greater revelation of how blessed we are because of God's holiness. I believe the more we see what it means to us, the more we will desire it in our own lives. Open your eyes to God's glory in the lives of people. Hear it in their testimonies. Dwell on His glorious attributes and cry out with the heavenly beings, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is filled with His glory."

Questions

- 1 Describe the setting of Isaiah's vision.
- 2 What is the purpose of seraphim?
- 3 What is their song and what does it mean?
- 4 Why do they sing it?
- 5 How did this affect Isaiah?
- 6 What did God do for Isaiah?
- 7 What did He do for us?
- 8 Why could Isaiah volunteer? Why can you?
- 9 How did God show His holiness in the Exodus?
- 10 How did Jesus demonstrate holiness?