

The Holiness of God (Part 2)

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[0:00] Last Sunday, we heard a message on the holiness of God.

! A study primarily centered on Isaiah chapter 6, and this morning is part two of that message. Now, I know that last Sunday was part of the Labor Day weekend and the Labor Day break, and so this morning I will do a brief review. This will be a refresher for those of you who are here and bring others up to speed if you were not able to be here.

And always remember, you can see these services on the website, the Highland Park website, and so I'd welcome you and invite you to do that as well.

Well, I began last Sunday with two foundational truths. God is holy. I am not.

[1:26] And through the week, that hasn't changed. That's still true. As a subject, the preaching of the doctrine of the holiness of God has all but disappeared from the pulpits of our land.

Churches have become very self-centered, more human-oriented than God-oriented, and yet holiness is the central truth.

The holiness of God is the central truth taught in the Word of God. It touches everything. God loves us with a holy love.

God has called us with a holy calling. God dispenses holy mercy and holy grace. Everything God is, we can put holy on there.

He has a holy wrath towards sin. Everything about God is permeated with holiness. Let me offer this definition of holiness.

[2:43] This is from the pen of Dr. Charles Hodge, professor at theology in Princeton. I don't look for him there. He died about 1863.

But this was his definition of the holiness of God. To be holy is a general term for the moral excellence of God.

Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil, and on the other, absolute moral perfection.

Freedom from impurity is the primary idea of the Word. To sanctify is to cleanse. To be holy is to be clean.

Infinite purity, even more than infinite knowledge or infinite power, is the object of reverence. And by the way, let me add that God isn't sanctified.

[3:55] He is already perfect and pure and holy. Let me give you a simple, less eloquent definition on the holiness of God.

God is without sin. God does not conform to any holy standard. He is the standard.

God has no degrees of holiness. He is perfectly and absolutely holy. Now, we're going to again be in Isaiah 6.

If you want to turn there, while I lay a foundation, very briefly. After a 52-year reign on the throne of Judah, King Uzziah has died.

The nation, including Isaiah, is in mourning. Compared to others, Uzziah was considered a successful king.

[5:08] He had subdued the enemies of Judah, and he had fortified Jerusalem. Uzziah had developed the nation's agriculture. He had developed their commerce.

The country had prospered under his rule. So, being a politician, and we see this all the time in America, Isaiah took a little trip.

He traveled the countryside in Judah, and he asked the people everywhere he went, have you seen all the things that I've accomplished?

We hear this often, don't we? And he asked the people, look what I have done for you. His bragging was pride, and pride was his downfall.

The accomplishments did not belong to Uzziah. The accomplishments belong to God. Uzziah was merely a human instrument.

[6:14] And God could have raised up anybody to have accomplished what he wanted to accomplish. As a result of this pride, God gave Uzziah a terminal case of leprosy.

He died, and we find Isaiah the greatest prophet, I think, of Israel and of Judah, the southern kingdom.

And he is in mourning for the loss of his king. Well, Uzziah has died, and Isaiah wants to go to the earthly temple there to seek peace and comfort.

Now, Isaiah goes to that earthly temple, and he enters in. And I don't know how this happened, but somehow, he is transported to the heavenly temple.

I don't know if it was a vision. I don't know if it was bodily. I mean, when I use that word transported, I think of Star Trek. I don't know if it was like that or not, but he was transported into the heavenly temple, the eternal temple.

[7:38] And he sees the eternal king of all kings. Isaiah 6.1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting up on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train or the hem of his robe filled the temple.

And as I said last week, it was a big temple. It was a big temple. In the Hebrew language, Isaiah looked upon Adonai.

That's the sovereign Lord of the universe. And if there's any question in anyone's mind as to who this was, the Holy Spirit writing the gospel of John through the apostle John in John 12.41 identifies the person Isaiah saw as the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's who Isaiah is looking at. Verse 2, Above him stood the seraphim. each had six wings and with two they covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Seraphim are that unique order of angels. They attend to the holiness of God. And God is so holy they cannot gaze at him, so they covered their eyes.

[9:18] and they're on holy ground, so they covered their feet. And then with the other third set of wings they hovered. I said last week they were like a celestial helicopter.

And they hovered. They hovered. And they declare the Lord to be thrice holy. The scriptures tell us one called to another and said holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. Now I don't know how many seraphim are in the heavenly temple hovering above the throne.

I have no idea. There may be two. There may be a half a dozen. There may be hundreds. There may be more. But they keep up an eternal antiphonal you didn't know I knew that word did you Mike?

An antiphonal chorus describing God to be thrice holy. Now you have a seraphim and he's hovering not over me but in the holy temple and he declares holy, holy, holy, and about the third holy a seraphim over there picks it up and he does holy, holy, holy is the Lord but on his third holy another seraphim so that's what antiphonal means and you've got these beautiful voices eternally declaring the holiness of God.

[11:05] I had a very good friend of mine, a minister of the gospel who we were talking one day, we disagreed on a lot of things and I think he's come a long way but he said, you know, if I were a seraphim I'd be bored to death after the first five minutes and I didn't make a comment on it since it bordered on blasphemy but they're not bored, they're not bored, they have the high calling of guarding the holiness of God and declaring his holiness to the heavenly hosts, they're not bored.

So Isaiah is in there and he sees these seraphim hovering and he hears and I don't think they were very quiet and listen to what happens in verse four, and the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke.

That would get my attention. I trust that would get your attention. It got Isaiah's attention. Now thus far this is quite a picture.

Isaiah, arguably the greatest prophet, has been called up into the highest heaven and there he sees the king, Yahweh, Christ Jesus, the great I am, sitting on his throne.

He sees the seraphim, which by the way means literally the burning ones, as they guard and declare the eternal, sovereign, holiness, and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:14] And the seraphim calls out to this antiphonal singing or chanting, and by the way I never heard that word before I started this study, and it was very beautiful and as they called out, the

thresholds shook.

Now remember, this is in heaven. This is in heaven. Heaven is shaking. And amid the shaking, the king himself calls out and the temple is filled with smoke.

And with all this going on, Isaiah's next statement is completely understandable because he next says, woe, woe.

That little three letter word which is so important, W-O-E, woe. The prophet saw the sovereign Lord seated in glory, seated in holiness, seated in majesty, and he cries out, woe is me.

He pronounces on himself by using that word woe, he pronounces on himself judgment. He brings himself under judgment.

[14 : 36] judgment. And by the way, he's used that word in Isaiah before and after. He uses woe a total of seven times, the perfect number, the number of God. Isaiah has no doubt.

He's finished. I guess we would say in the 21st century, he's toast. He's seen the holiness of Yahweh.

In his mind, there's no way he can survive this encounter. He's seen the holy God of the universe, and he is undone. And all he can think of, I'm ruined, I'm lost, I'm devastated, I will soon cease to exist.

And let me tell you what's going on. for the first time in his life, though he is a great prophet, for the very first time in his life, Isaiah not only saw the Lord, but he saw himself in comparison.

And that's why he cries out, woe, because Isaiah sees himself and he says, woe is me, for I am lost, I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

[16 : 17] And again, woe is a word used in both Old and New Testament. judgment. It is used to pronounce judgment. Jesus used that word to pronounce judgment.

Woe to you teachers of the law. Woe to you Pharisees. Woe to you hypocrites. Woe to you blind guides.

Seven times, in Matthew chapter 23, the Lord pronounces woe, and that's judgment on the Pharisees.

And by the way, who are they? The most religious people in the nation of Israel. And people say, well, how can that be?

If they were religious, well, you have to know what religious means. If you get a dictionary old enough, a Webster's dictionary, because good brother Webster was a brother in Christ, and I've seen those in antique stores.

[17 : 28] I love to read them. Yeah, I read dictionaries. When we go to an antique store, Diane doesn't let me walk around because I break stuff, so she sets me in the book section and sometimes you find a dictionary that can be 120 years old.

And I looked up the word religion and it said in the original meaning, which comes from Latin, they return to bondage. How can that be?

Religion is man's efforts to reach God and they always fall short. Christ is God reaching down to men and women.

That's the difference. The Pharisees were the great religious teachers of Israel and the Lord Jesus pronounced woe upon them.

Now, from the human perspective, Isaiah may in fact have been the holiest man in the nation of Judah. But now his eyes have seen the holiness of God and Isaiah is reduced down to a lump of sinful flesh.

[18 : 49] I've been studying on this for weeks. I do a lot of my studying at 1.30, 2 o'clock in the morning. I did this morning. I did this morning. And I know how he feels.

You know, I'm reading these things about the holiness of God and I have to stop because I'll think of a sin I need to confess. I think of a sin I need to confess.

I'm reading a book I found not long ago called Linger at the Cross. I can't read four sentences before I have to pause and reflect and talk to the Lord.

And his eyes have seen God and he knows he's a sinner. And he declares in the Hebrew that he's annihilated. he is devastated by the holiness of God and being in the presence of his holiness and so would anyone else including the very extreme charismatic preachers who are trying to make trees walk who claim to have visited God visited God or Jesus in heaven.

I remember when that started. I happened to catch it. I don't watch them as a practice but I caught one of them on TV who had this announcement and he said I got called up into the highest heaven last week and when I got there I'm not making this up when I got there I saw Jesus and he was standing over in the corner he wasn't high and lifted up he's standing in the corner and he's crying and I went over to him and I put my arm around him and I said what's the matter Jesus and he said I'm a failure this was this guy's words he said why do you say that Lord he said look at all the people that are dying and going to hell I couldn't reach them and he said I told Jesus don't weep we've got everything under control down there we're going to handle all this and you know as blasphemous as that is within three weeks to a month all those named guys had had a visit to heaven why because that guy started getting all the money and these others had to catch up and you have all kinds of those guys claiming they had been there let me tell you something folks they haven't been there they haven't been there when you and I see Jesus we're going to be like him because we're going to see him as he is we're going to be without sin and none of us are and I'm the chief of those sinners we're going to see

[21:52] Jesus as he is and we're not going to walk up and say what's going on here we're going to talk about that toward the end here we'll talk about that this next statement is the heart of what I've said today and last week if we don't have an understanding that God and Trinity Father Son Holy Spirit is absolute holiness we will not fully grasp our own sinfulness failing to understand our sinfulness will render us incapable of grasping the consequences of sin and sin has consequences if we fail there salvation becomes meaningless it becomes a meaningless concept to a lot of people and that's what happened to Isaiah this is what happens when we see God on the throne not with physical eyes but with our spirit with our heart as we read the word as we meditate as we pray sometimes get down on your face in a dark room and pray

I've done that I haven't done it very much I need to do more it's scary when your youngest son is about four and he almost trips over you at two o'clock in the morning he came down for a drink of water we see ourselves for who we are and I'll tell you another thing we do we stop comparing ourselves to others don't say you know I am a sinner but I'm not as bad as that other guy no don't don't go there we stop comparing ourselves to others and we start comparing ourselves to God what's his standard he doesn't have one he is the standard the more we see of God's glory the more we see of our need for grace and God will add grace

Isaiah caught a glimpse of the holiness of God and he was undone he was undone by his holiness God's holiness and his lack of holiness but God did not abandon him he did not leave him in his sins aren't we glad Isaiah knew that he was a sinner and that he was far too unholy to stand in the presence of the thrice holy God and Isaiah confessed his sins to the Lord and on the spot he received abundant grace and mercy the same abundant grace and mercy we all need and having confessed his sin to the Lord look what happens next in verse 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 and he touched my mouth and said behold this has touched your lips your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for wow do business with that this week here we see a most powerful demonstration of the saving grace of God the angel takes a coal from the altar that is vitally important to understand the altar was a place of sacrifice the altar was where a lamb had been offered as an atonement for sin and I'm convinced the altar in the heavenly temple is sprinkled with the blood of

Christ that was shed on the cross Isaiah was reconciled to God on the basis of a blood sacrifice how important is that and especially if you've not yet been reconciled by a blood sacrifice how important is that Hebrews 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin and sometimes that bothers some people that may bother somebody in here all I can say to you is take that up with God he declared that where was Isaiah's guilt well in Isaiah's case his guilt was in his speech he was a man of unclean lips he had a dirty mouth and he said you know there's a whole lot of people have dirty mouths

I've actually in 46 years heard one or two police officers with dirty mouths I heard a couple of marines one time my brother and sister a lot of people have dirty mouths the sacrifice was applied directly to the place of Isaiah's guilt the burning coal was placed in direct contact with Isaiah's lips you know that had to be painful that had to hurt but it was made necessary because the prophet of God had used his lips to engage in sinful speech and the angel tells him and boy listen to this your guilt has been taken away wow and then he says your sin is atoned for by the way that's the word appeasement it's the word satisfaction

[28:15] Christ died an atoning death what does that mean a satisfaction well who did he satisfy he satisfied God the father he satisfied God the father God the father has wrath towards sin Jesus atoned for every sin you and I will ever commit as believers by the way that's good news the touching of the hot coal symbolized two things it represented first the removal of Isaiah's guilt this guilt for sins was what he inherited from Adam it is the same guilt all of us inherited and we inherited it from Adam and it can only be removed by Christ the burning coal represented the atonement of the

Lord Isaiah was reconciled to God by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross although that would not happen for hundreds of years the only difference between Isaiah and you and I is he looked forward to the cross we look back to the cross that's the difference and note also please Isaiah could do nothing to remove his guilt before God he and we cannot pay for our own sins more than one time I've shared the Lord with people and said when I clean up my act I'm going to come to Jesus no he'll never clean up your act that's never going to happen only Jesus can clean up your act Isaiah was the object of sovereign grace that's the same grace we need the

Lord had accomplished his redemption and now he applied his redemption he made application Isaiah encountered the holiness of the Lord and his life was changed forever Isaiah was not the only person in history to encounter the holiness of God I want to fast forward a little bit you don't have to turn there but let's fast forward for just a moment there was a place called the Mount of Transfiguration it's written about in Matthew 17 and other places and after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother and led them to a high mountain by themselves the other disciples were down in the valley and

Jesus was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light and behold there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with him and Peter you know you remember foot and mouth Peter he was always sticking his foot in his mouth Peter says Lord it's good that we're here and if you want me to I'll make three tents that's tabernacles places to worship and I'll make one for you and I'll make one for Moses and I'll make one for Elijah what's Peter doing he's putting Moses who represents the law and Elijah who represents the prophets on the same footing as Jesus Christ and while

Moses is still speaking this error and that's what it was a bright cloud overshadows them and I would imagine that shut Moses up it would have me and a voice comes from the cloud and by the way that's God the father and we know that because the voice says this is my beloved son not Moses not Elijah this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased listen to him the father gives a command listen to him and when the disciples heard this they fell on their faces and were terrified they didn't try to put their arms around God said it'll be okay we have everything under control they fell on their faces and were terrified and the other gospels relate they fainted they passed out you know what that was the mercy of God they can't look on God's holiness in fullness

[33:49] God was merciful people say well how did Jesus come to earth and walk around he was God in human flesh well yes he was and his glory was veiled in human flesh but it peeked through right here it peeked through on the man of transfiguration and they were terrified and they fell and then they come awake and Jesus said rise he's alone now he said have no fear that would be comforting let me mention to you the arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane John 18 when Jesus had spoken these words he went forth with his disciples over the ravine of the Kidron always have to pause and talk about the Kidron the Kidron is a stream there's some water that flows in it but there was a hill outside the temple where they sacrificed hundreds of thousands of lambs and rams and and turtle doves every year and there was a trough that caught their blood and it ran down that hill and it ran into the

Kidron the Kidron flowed blood red and Jesus on his way to Gethsemane stepped over the Kidron I wonder if he looked down I don't know this for a fact but I wonder if he looked down and saw that blood and he said very soon those sacrifices will no longer be necessary in a matter of a couple hours they go over the Kidron to a garden in which he entered with his disciples now Judas also who was betraying him knew the place for Jesus had often met there with his disciples Judas then having received the Roman cohort officers from the chief priests and Pharisees he came and he snatched off the Lord and they come out with lanterns and torches and weapons and we don't know how many

I think it's more than a dozen it might have been hundreds it could have been thousands I don't believe it was thousands but it might have been but they came out and it was Romans and Jewish

temple police and they come out with lanterns and torches and weapons so Jesus knowing all things including the fact they were coming for him went forth he goes out in front of his disciples and he says whom do you seek and they said Jesus the Nazarene and you can look this up this afternoon your Bible probably says that Jesus remarked to them I am he but the he in your translation should be in italics why would they put it in italics because it wasn't in there that was added by a scribe it wasn't in the original autograph what did

Jesus say they said we're seeking Jesus the Nazarene and Jesus said I am the holiest name for God the same thing Jesus said to Moses from the burning bush I am and Judas was in the midst of betraying him and was standing there with him and when Jesus said to them I am they drew back and they fell to the ground I would love to have seen that and I still get mad at Mel Gibson for leaving that out of the passion of the Christ that was a high dramatic moment they all fell to the ground finally they come to their senses and they're able to take Jesus into custody they saw his holiness peek through at the very mention of his name he is

Yahweh the sovereign holy king of kings we have a third time John is on the island of Patmos he's a prisoner he's quite old and he says this I John your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus did you hear that in Jesus tribulation and kingdom and perseverance and he says I'm on an island called Patmos because of the word of the Lord the word of God and the testimony of Jesus he's under arrest he's living out his life on Patmos he's going to be released he didn't know it at the time I was in the spirit on the

[39:39] Lord's day that doesn't necessarily mean Sunday every day is the Lord's day and I heard behind me a loud voice like a sound of a trumpet saying write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches to Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergammon and Thyatira and Sardis and to Philadelphia and Laodicea and then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me and having turned I saw seven golden lamp stands and in the middle of the lamp stands I saw one like a son of man and we know who the son of man is right that's the son of God Jesus listen to John's description of it he was clothed in a robe reaching to his feet he was girded across his chest with a golden sash his head and his hair were white like wool like snow and his eyes were like a flame of fire his feet were like burnished bronze when it has been made to glow in a furnace and his voice was like the sound of many waters in his right hand he held seven stars and out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword and his face was like the sun shining in its strength now I want to say something about

John okay and this isn't not all this is revelation some of it's my speculation but John was the youngest of the disciples over and over in his gospel he says he refers to himself as the disciple Jesus loved I used to be offended by that before I realized the Holy Spirit wrote those words and I stopped being offended real fast this is the disciple whom Jesus loved I kind of have this image that being the youngest probably 16 he's with these older guys these fishermen and tax collector and burly guys I think Jesus looked out for him I really believe that I think he made sure John got an extra portion of food I think that John Jesus probably and nights get cold in the Middle East I've been there I think John got an extra blanket probably belonged to Jesus and he got in the middle of night and covered him up because it was cold I think John got a special place nearest the fire I don't know these as a fact the scriptures don't say all that but I think that probably happened so he's got this very special relationship with the Lord Jesus when he was on mission with Jesus during his earthly ministry but now he sees the glorified Christ and listen to what God's word says and when I saw him I fell at his feet like a dead man he fell at his feet the disciple whom Jesus loved falls at his feet passes out he appeared to be dead because he's looking on some of the glory of

Christ I say some because no man no woman can see the full glory of God and live that's in the Bible I often think of Robert Murray McShane it's to our shame that most Christians have never heard of that name he was born in Edinburgh Scotland in 1813 I'm going to read to you three entries in his diary June 30th 1830 much carelessness sin and sorrow oh wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death enter thou my soul into the rock and hide thee in the dust for fear of the Lord and the glory of his majesty July 3rd 1832 couple years later this latter this last bitter root of worldliness that has so often betrayed me has this night so grossly that I cannot be regarded as God's chosen way to make me loathe and forsake it forever I would vow but it is much more like a weekly worm to pray sit in the dust oh my soul and then July 22nd 1832 had this evening a more complete understanding of that self emptying and abasement with which it

is necessary to come to Christ a denying of self trampling it underfoot a recognizing of the complete righteousness and justice of God that could do nothing else with us but condemn us utterly and thrust us down to lowest hell a feeling that even in hell we should rejoice in his sovereignty and say that all was rightly done he caught a glimpse of the holiness of the trinity in his bible study and he read those words and it impacted his life and let me tell you something remarkable when he wrote those he had been a believer a couple of months and he was 19 years old when he wrote those in his diary he had been converted to

[45:52] Christ only a few months earlier he served at St. Peter's Church in Dundee Scotland he died at the age of 29 oh that we could see the holiness of God as Robert Murray McShane did and he didn't see him in the holy temple he saw him in the word the same word we have available to us that's where he saw his holiness well we are here today to give God our worship so how do we close I'm going to give you a quote from John MacArthur you didn't think you get away without hearing from brother MacArthur it's actually from I believe it's the first book he ever wrote worship the ultimate priority this is what John says God is a living eternal glorious merciful holy being as his worshipers we must come in the contrition and humility and brokenness of sinners who see ourselves against the backdrop of that holiness and that should put such thanksgiving and joy in our hearts for the gift of his forgiveness that our worship is all that it should be we are to live lives of confession repentance and turning from our sin so that our worship is that which fully pleases

God we dare not go rushing into his presence in unholiness we cannot worship God acceptably without sincere reverence godly fear and I want to add to you godly fear is what we have as believers it is not hiding in a dark corner saying I hope he doesn't find me here it is reverential trust in the perfection and holiness of God that's godly fear we trust him we trust his word and our worship must be arrayed in the beauty of holiness we must return to the biblical teaching of God's utter and awesome holiness in order to be filled with the gratitude and humility that characterizes true worship and as believers that begins with confession 1st John 1:9 if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness

I read one guy at 3 o'clock this morning and he said this before my feet hit the floor when I wake up in the morning I say Lord have mercy on me a sinner that's how he starts his day that's a pretty good way I think to start your day so that's how Dr.

MacArthur ended it let me end it with this word in other words we must see God as Isaiah saw God and we can read about it high and lifted up his robe filled the temple it shook seraphim declaring his holiness and we went to him in prayer and confession knowing that he loves us he has redeemed us if you've been redeemed and if you haven't been this is your time because he's still calling out of people for the name of his son God the father is calling out of people that will worship his son for eternity that's what life is about that's what life on this earth is about and he's still about those things Thank you.