

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/7/93
Isaiah 6:6-8 "How Can Sinful People Be Right With a Holy God?"

Intro:

Last Week:

Last week we began a new series on "The Holiness of God." I confessed then, as I do again today, that I feel severely inadequate to stand before you addressing such a great theme. For many reasons: One, the more I study God's holiness the less I realize I understand about it. Two, the more I see God's holiness, the more I see my lack of holiness. And yet this I know. Once we begin to grasp the fact that God is holy, we'll never be the same again.

Case in point--Isaiah.

Isaiah topped the list of "Who's Who in Israel" in the 8th century BC. He was not only a prophet. He was the Prince of the prophets. It was from his pen that God revealed that the Messiah would enter human history through a virgin (7:14), that the Messiah would be "Emmanuel" (9:6), that would die a horrible death to pay for our sins (53:3), and that he would establish a great kingdom (4:2).

One day, Isaiah came face to face with the Holiness of God. And he was never the same again. He describes his call to the ministry in ch 6. Let me read for you, from last week, what Isaiah saw, heard, and did, as recorded in Is 6:1-5.

READ 6:1-5

Isaiah was devastated by the Holiness of God.

Illust:

You say, "Well that was just Isaiah."

Q: What have others done when confronted by the presence of a Holy God?

Minoah

Who was Minoah? You can read about him in Judges 13. He was Samson's father. Before Samson was born, Minoah's wife was barren (2). God sent an angel to her and told her she would bear a son (3). She told her husband the news. Minoah pleaded with God to send that messenger again (8). God did. Minoah offered a sacrifice. Do you remember what happened next?

13:20 "For it came to pass when the flame went up...the angel ascended..."

13:20 "And Minoah...fell on their faces to the ground."

13:22 "...We shall surely die, because we have seen God."

Q: What happens when you realize you're in the presence of a Holy God?

A: Minoah fell on his face.

Habakkuk

Habakkuk lived 100 years after Isaiah.

Illust: Review Bible Map (Divide room up into countries)

Something bugged Habakkuk. He was a prophet. But his people were wicked. So he questioned God...

1. God, what are you going to do about the sin of Israel? (1:1-4)

God's answer--"I'm going to raise up the Babylonians!" (1:6)

2. God, how can you do that?! They're more wicked than us!" (1:12ff)
So guess what Habakkuk did? He went up on a tower, sat down, and waited (2:1).

Uh oh! What happened next? Guess what God did. He told Habakkuk, "Wait a minute Habakkuk. You said you didn't understand my plan. You don't need to understand. I am God. You live by faith (2:4)." God's answer climaxed in 2:20.

2:20 "But the LORD is in his HOLY Temple; let all the earth keep silence..."

Q: How did Habakkuk respond then?

--he was afraid (3:2) --he trembled (3:16) --then he rejoiced (3:18)

Objection: "Are you kidding me? He trembled before God? I don't like that."

Problem: MacArthur is right on, "We water down the gospel. People don't like a God like that..."

Illust: Have you ever walked through the woods, and turned over a rock? What happened? The bugs scurried and scattered. Why? To get out of the light.

People are like that. Jesus said, "Men love darkness rather than light" (Jn 3:19). The natural man cringes in the light of God's holiness.

Job

You remember Job.

ch 1-2 Job lost his possessions, family, reputation, and health

ch 3-37 Job's lament

3:1 "Job opened his mouth and cursed his day."

"What's going on God? Where are You God? Have you forgotten me God? God, I want answers."

Q: Then what happened?

In ch 38-41, God gave Job answers! By the time he was done, Job was saying, "I don't want answers anymore!"

38:1 "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind..."

38:2ff (NIV), "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me."

Questions: Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? (4)
Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place? (12) Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? (32)
Do you send lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, Here we are? (35)
Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? (39:1) Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? (19)

God asked Job question after question. Job, "Can you...can you...?"

Q: How did Job respond?

40:3-4 "...I am vile..."

42:6 "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Objection: "Wew, Job had a bad self image!"

No. Job had a correct self image. He thought he knew God, and he thought he knew himself. Until God spoke to him. Until he came under the scrutiny of a Holy

God. And then he realized how little he really knew God, and how little he knew himself.

Joshua

Joshua had an encounter with God. He fell on his face (5:14). Why?
5:15 "The place where you are standing is HOLY ground."

Key: There's no getting around it. Holiness makes people feel uncomfortable.

Illust: Did you ever notice what a crowd of people will do when a pastor walks into their presence? eg--When I'm playing ball with guys, "Oops, sorry for that slip of the tongue, Preacher." Why the apology? Because of the position. Even ungodly people recognize that a pastor is associated with (or supposed to be) God.

Listen. If a representative of God makes people feel uncomfortable, how much more so will God Himself. Why? Because He is holy! Because His holiness threatens us. Because His holiness reminds us of the cracks in our armor. Minoah fell on his face. Habakkuk trembled. Job clammed up in shame. Joshua hit the ground.

Objection: "I don't believe like that. I don't believe in a God who upsets people. I don't believe in a God who allows people to go to hell. My God isn't like that. My God is a God of love."

Wait a minute! "YOUR" God? How many Gods are there? There is only One God. And who what God is like, us or Him?

Friends, we'll never fully appreciate the Love of God until we come to grips with His Holiness first.

Q: How can sinful people be right with a Holy God?
Isaiah shows us, by his own example.

Proposition: As we consider Isaiah's experience in Isaiah 6:5-8, we'll see that there are 3 steps we need to take if we are to be right with a holy God.

- I. Admit your Guilt (5).
- II. Accept His Cleansing (6-7).
- III. Avail yourself for Service (8).

I. Admit your Guilt (5).

Isaiah did. I need to remind you that Isaiah was probably one of (if not THE) the most righteous, upstanding, God-fearing, religious, reputable people of his day. But when he came into the presence of a Holy God, what did he do? Did he rush out of the Temple to the courtyard and shout, "Come everybody and see!"

No. He crumbled--V 5.

"Woe is me"--Curse me! Pronounce judgment on me! Why?

"I am undone"--I'm coming apart at the seams, disintegrating, crumbling. Why?

"I am a man of unclean lips"--I have a dirty mouth, a reflection of a dirty heart!

"for mine eyes have seen THE KING"

When Isaiah was confronted with God's holiness, he was overwhelmed with his own sinfulness. So what did he do? Did he try to run and hide? No, where could he go? Did he try to shift the blame for his sinfulness? ("It's not my fault I'm the way I am God. It's my parent's fault, my teacher's fault, my environment's fault.") No.

Isaiah admitted his guilt.

Quote: R.C. Sproul, "Nothing terrifies us more than to be in the presence of the Holy One. Why? Because we are not holy."

Q: Have you ever admitted the fact that you are guilty before God?

A lot of people struggle with guilt. Some try to cover up guilt (with alcohol, with work). Some try to shift guilt. Some try to ignore guilt. Isaiah admitted his guilt.

Have you acknowledged your guilt to God? There can be no freedom from guilt until there is admission of guilt.

Illust:

Tran: Step 1, Isaiah admitted his guilt. "Woe is me, I am undone..."

Q: What did God do?

Did God say, "Isaiah, don't be so morbid. You have a guilt hangup!" No.

Did God say, "Suffer you miserable creep. Wallow in your guilt. You deserve it."

No. There was no cheap grace, nor whimsical vengeance. Watch what God did.

Vv 6-7 "Then flew one of the seraphim..."

Here's step 2. To be right with a Holy God, we must...

II. Accept His Cleansing (6-7).

I gasp as I read this account. The seraphim are the "fiery ones." God sent one of the seraphim to the altar. He picked up a fiery coal with a set of tongs. Fire is an image of God's holiness. Fire is slightly terrifying. Fire can destroy, but it can also cleanse.

He took the fiery coal from the altar. What altar? Possibly the altar of incense which stood just in front of the Holy of holies. Lev 16:12 tells us that coals of fire from the altar were taken inside the Holy of Holies once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

What's going on? Isaiah was guilty. He needed cleansing. He needed an atonement. Atonement is possible only through sacrifice. God does not ignore sin. He forgives sin, but forgiveness demands sacrifice.

Watch this...

Q: What did the seraph do with that white hot coal?

V 7 "And he laid it upon my mouth"

Ooh! On his mouth?! Do you know how sensitive your lips are? The coal was not placed on the calloused bottoms of his feet, as painful as that would have been. The burning coal was placed on his mouth. Why?

What was Isaiah's problem? V 5 "I am a man of unclean lips. I've got a dirty mouth. And my dirty mouth is merely a reflection of my dirty heart."

Q: What happened when the fiery coal touched Isaiah's mouth?

A: It formed an instant blister. The coal catarized his lips. The coal brought healing to his mouth, and cleansing to his dirty heart. How do we know that?

V 7b "Lo, this has touched your lips...thine iniquity is taken away..."

Holiness is something we cannot earn. We must receive it. The seraph announced to Isaiah, "You don't have to curse yourself any longer. Your guilt is gone."

You say, "That live coal must have hurt!" Listen. The price of repentance is very painful! Salvation is free, but it is not cheap.

Key: The Cross is the "live coal" that touches our lips, that purges us (MacAr).

When the cross touches us, it makes us pure. Oh friend, do you know why Jesus Christ died on the cross? Because God is holy! Listen. Because God is holy, He must judge sin. His holiness demands that He pour out His wrath on someone, either upon us, or upon Jesus Christ.

Q: How can sinful people like us be right with a holy God?

A: There's only one way. We must accept God's cleansing for our sin.

Do you know what is tragic? The world is full of people, and you may be one, who are trying to make themselves holy. They're trying to clean up their lives so God will accept them. They're trying to earn God's favor. Is it possible? Listen to Isaiah:

64:6 "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags..."

We can't make ourselves holy. Only God can make us holy. How?

61:10 "He has clothed me with garments of salvation..."

Illust: Wardrobe change

Tran: There was a third step in Isaiah's experience that shows us how sinful people can be right with a holy God. One, admit your guilt. Two, accept His cleansing.

III. Avail yourself for Service (8).

V 8 "Also I heard the voice of the Lord {first times he hears GOD'S voice?}

God: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

Go where? To preach His Word to the people of Judah

Isaiah: "Here am I; send me."

God's Response (v 9): "And He said, Go!"

One moment Isaiah had a dirty mouth, and was crumbling in shame. The next moment he's availing his mouth for God's service. What made the difference?

A sinful man did 3 things: He admitted his guilt before a holy God. He accepted the cleansing provided by that holy God. And he availed himself for service to that holy God.

Listen. Isaiah was thrilled with the privilege to serve God. Are you?

Some people refuse to serve the Lord. You have to twist their arm so they'll use their time and energy for the Lord. If you don't want to serve God, you don't

understand God's grace towards you. As we grasp how little we deserve God's salvation, there's nothing we won't want to do for Him!

Illust:

Communion:

Communion is a Celebration. Do you know what we're celebrating? How a holy God could make sinful people like us holy! Only through the atonement of Christ.