

Isaiah 6:1-5 "What Is God's Greatest Attribute?" [\[1\]](#)

Main Idea: In Isaiah 6, Isaiah had a confrontation with the Holiness of God and was never the same again.

I. What Isaiah Saw (1-2)

A. The Lord (1)

B. The Seraphim (2)

II. What Isaiah Heard (3-4)

III. What Isaiah Did (5)

God is in a class all by Himself—there is none like Him. He is *great*. But what is this great God's *greatest* attribute? Listen to...

Exodus 15:11 "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

1 Samuel 2:2 "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."

What sets God apart from all else? What is God's Greatest Attribute? I would suggest is often the attribute of God most ignored. For that matter, it's the one we least understand. God's greatest attribute is His holiness.

This evening we're embarking on a new series. I feel totally inadequate to lead in this study of the Holiness of God. As we dig into God's Word the next six weeks or so, you'll see why.

New Series: "The Holiness of God"

#1 "What is God's Greatest Attribute?" Isaiah 6:1-5

#2 "Sinful Men in the Presence of a Holy God" Job 38; Habakkuk 3:2, 16; Is 6:6-8

#3 "But It Doesn't Seem Fair" Leviticus 10; II Samuel 6

#4 "What Is Holiness?" Exodus 15:11

#5 "Confrontation with the Holiness of Christ" Luke 5:1; Luke 8:22

#6 "The Proper Response to God's Holiness" I Peter 1:16

The Holiness of God is not a popular topic. I realize if I did a series on "Family Relationships" or "What the Bible Has to Say About Finances," we would probably attract a big crowd. Or even a series about God's Love or Heaven. People like to hear that God is Merciful and Kind and Gentle and Generous. Don't get me wrong. God is all of that. But His greatest attribute, His most fundamental characteristic, His trait that makes sinful people like us most

uncomfortable, is His Holiness.

We'll never be the same again once we get a hold of the fact that God is Holy.

Where do we begin in a study of God's Holiness? We could begin with a technical word study of holiness. We could try to define what holiness is. And we will do that later, in the fourth week. But we want to begin by looking at people in the Bible who actually had a confrontation with the Holiness of God. No person is more qualified than Isaiah. In Isaiah 6 Isaiah was confronted with the holiness of God and was never the same again.

Background:

Who was Isaiah? Isaiah was a prophet of God in Israel . Many feel he was the greatest of Israel 's prophets. He has been called the Prince of the Prophets. He was God's chief spokesman to the Jews in the 8th century B.C. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem . He had direct access to the political leaders of his day. In fact, he ministered for over 60 years, during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1, and Manasseh?). Those may be meaningless names to us. But listen. Isaiah lived during a pivotal time in Israel 's history.

In ch 6, Isaiah relates his call to the ministry. When did it take place?

V 1 "In the year that King Uzziah died"

Please don't miss that. God called Isaiah to the ministry in the year that Uzziah died. Who was Uzziah? What kind of king was he? [Do Bible Walk Through--divide up room...]

Let's plug in some dates:

740-680 BC Isaiah ministered as a prophet

790-739 BC Uzziah reigned in Judah

Uzziah (also known as Azariah) was one of the top 5 kings in Israel 's history. During his rule there was a political vacuum in the Middle East . That allowed him to bring political stability to his nation. His 50 year reign was characterized by prosperity and peace. But then he died.

And when he died people like Isaiah started wondering, "What's going to happen to our country now? Will our next ruler be a good leader or bad leader?" To complicate things, the Assyrians were starting to rattle their sabers to the north. The mighty Assyrian dictator Tiglath Polesar began attacking and conquering surrounding nations in 745 BC. In fact, in the year 722 BC, he moved into the northern kingdom of Israel and obliterated it. The southern kingdom of Judah was next.

In the year that King Uzziah died. That's when God called Isaiah to the ministry. How do you think Isaiah felt? Concerned, to say the least. Why? Because the people to whom he ministered were morally corrupt! For example...

1:2 "Hear...they have rebelled against Me."

1:4 "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity..."

5:20 "Woe unto them who call evil good, and good evil..." (6 "Woes" in ch 5)

There's the situation in which Isaiah found himself. He lived in a morally decadent nation. What he thought was the last ray of hope, King Uzziah, just died. Then it happened. What happened?

READ Isaiah 6:1-5. The text tells us three things about Isaiah's confrontation with the holiness of God.

I. What Isaiah Saw (1-2)

His eyes focused on two sights that horrified him!

A. Isaiah saw the Lord (1)

V 1 "I saw also the Lord..."

Every now and then people will claim to have had an experience where they saw God. Usually they describe their experience as being "serene" and "peaceful."

Listen. When Isaiah saw God, he was never the same again. He was absolutely terrified and overwhelmed. Notice his admission--"I saw the Lord."

"LORD" = Yahweh; sacred name of God; His covenant name (v 5)

"Lord" = Adonai; most exalted title of God in OT; The Sovereign One

Did you catch that? Apparently Isaiah went into the temple. When he went in he was full of doubts and questions since his king had just died. But then he had a vision of the very interior of heaven. He says he saw "the Lord." THE Sovereign One. THE Ruler of the Universe.

What was the Lord doing? "sitting upon a throne..." I agree with R. C. Sproul. I think that Isaiah actually saw a Preincarnate Glimpse of Christ Himself sitting on His heavenly throne (Jn 12:41).

In ancient times clothing was a status symbol for rulers. What struck Isaiah about the Lord? "His train filled the temple."—Wow! His train was not only long. It actually filled the temple! Isaiah struggles to find words that communicate the Majesty he saw.

I could have entitled this message, "What Should A Country Do When It Gets A New Leader?" I think a lot of people are a little uneasy about the leadership transition facing our country in the next year. Perhaps rightly so.

Do you know what would help us more than anything? To see what Isaiah saw. To realize who the Real Ruler of the Universe is!

B. Isaiah saw the Seraphim (2)

V 2 "Above it stood the seraphim"

This is the only reference to seraphim in Scripture. What are seraphim? They are mysterious, awesome beings. Their name means "fiery ones." Notice where they are—"above the throne of the Lord." The seraphim are part of the heavenly host (along with angels, archangels, principalities, powers, and cherubim). God created the seraphim to serve Him day and night, in His very presence.

But notice what struck Isaiah about these fiery creatures. V 2—"Each had six wings..." Why do they have six wings? They fly with two of them. What about the other four? Did God get carried away when He passed out the wings? No. God doesn't waste what He creates. He gives the creature what is suitable for his environment.

What does the creature that serves in the very presence of God need? Two extra sets of wings. Think about those two extra sets...

--Two wings to cover the face

Why? To protect their eyes from the brilliance of God's presence!

Do you remember what Moses asked God in Ex 33:18?

33:18 "Show me Thy glory." What did God say?

33:20 "...no man shall see Me, and live." What did God do?

33:23 "...You shall see My back (=hind parts; "afterglow" MacArthur)..."

What happened when Moses saw God's backside?

34:8 "And Moses made haste, and bowed his head...and worshiped."

Do you remember what the people did when they saw Moses after that? They were petrified to come near him (34:30). Why? Because his face shone. Remember, they were struck with fear, and they only saw the reflection of a Backside Glance at God's glory!

Can you imagine how intense the full radiance of God's Majestic Glory would be? No wonder the seraphim, who serve in direct view of His Brilliance, cover their eyes!

--Two wings to cover their feet

Why? Feet are a symbol of creatureliness. Do you remember what God told Moses when he approached the burning bush? Ex 3:5, "Draw not near here; put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Even Seraphim, though they are awesome, are created beings, like us. And as creatures they cover their feet in the presence of a Holy God.

Isaiah had a confrontation with God, and was never the same again. He saw the Majestic Lord. He saw the fiery seraphim.

Application:

What Isaiah saw was astounding. But what impacted him even more was...

II. What Isaiah Heard (3-4)

The most incredible thing about the Seraphim was not what they looked like, but what they said. Before listening to the seraphim, listen to these words preached in a sermon some 250 years ago:

"The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousands times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours."

Who said that? Jonathan Edwards did in his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Those words startled his hearers. So did these... Listen to them in verse 3, "And one cried to another, Holy, holy, holy..."

What a song! The Hebrew language has an interesting way of stressing emphasis. In English if we want to emphasize something, we underline or use italics or put a star by it. The Hebrew language uses repetition for emphasis:

eg: Gal 1:8-9 "let him be accursed...let him be accursed."

eg: Jesus began his discourse often "Verily, verily" (Amen, Amen)

Only one time in all of the Bible is an attribute of God emphasized three times. Only one attribute is highlighted to the third degree, to the third power. The seraphim did not cry, "Love, love, love." Or "Mercy, mercy, mercy." Or "Power, power, power." No. The seraphim proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy."

Not just "Holy, holy." But thrice holy. Why? Because the holiness of God is the dimension of God that consumes His very essence. God's greatest attribute is His holiness.

Think about it: Bruce Ware "To say that God is holy is to say that He is eternally separate and distinct from all impurity. The term holiness in Hebrew, *qodesh*, has the notion of separation, of uniqueness, of one-of-kindness as it were."

What happens in the presence of a Holy God? See verse 4, "And the posts of the door moved..." The Temple trembled. Even inanimate objects like door posts are shaken by God's Majesty and Holiness. Isaiah thought he was in an earthquake. The sound of the seraphim caused the doorways to rock. Isaiah held on for his life. Mysterious smoke clouded his eyes, reminding him that a holy God is not to be surveyed casually with unveiled eyes.

What about us? What thoughts were going through your mind a few moments ago when we were singing about God? For that matter, what thoughts are you pondering right now as we gaze into the very Word of our Holy God?

We love to sing about the Love of God. And so we should. We cherish the grace of God. And rightly so, for apart from grace, none of us would be here. But we tend to overlook God's greatest and most basic attribute. God is holy.

Why is the American Church by and large shallow and powerless and ineffective? Could it be because we have a shallow view of our God. And could that be attributed to the fact that we have failed to give attention to His holiness.

To many, God is a great Genie in the sky. We have the notion that God exists for us. He's there to do our bidding. I want to tell you that once we see God as He is, once we grasp His holiness, we'll never be the same again.

Isaiah never got over what he saw and heard that day. The holiness of God marked him for life. For the next 50 years of ministry, Isaiah never lost sight of God's holiness.

Do you know what Isaiah's favorite title for God is in his book? Isaiah uses one title for God 26 times (only used 6 times in rest of OT!).

41:14 "...saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel."

41:16 "...glory in the Holy One of Israel."

Who is God? Ask Isaiah. He's the HOLY ONE. When Isaiah acknowledges God's holiness, he's recognizing that God is unique. He is totally distinct. There is none like Him.

43:11-12 "I am the LORD and beside Me there is no savior..."

45:11-12 "Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel ...I have made the earth..."

45:22 "Look unto me...for I am God, and there is none else."

Q: Does Christianity claim to be exclusive? You better believe it!

There is only one God. And there is only one way to be right with God, through His *holy* Son, Jesus Christ.

We've considered two things so far, what Isaiah saw and heard.

III. What Isaiah Did (5)

What do you think you would have done if you were in Isaiah's shoes? What did Isaiah do? Did he say, "Man, have I got a story to tell! I'm going to get a new suit and go on tour. I'm going to get on TV..." No.

V 5 "Then said I...woe is me." Stop there. Isaiah was a prophet. A prophet's job was to deliver God's message to people. Prophets delivered 2 kinds of messages: Good news and Bad news. When the prophet began a message of Good news, he started with the word, "Blessed" (eg--Sermon on Mount). But when he announced Bad news, news of God's judgment, he began with the horrid word "Woe!" When a prophet pronounced a "Woe," he was calling down God's curse, God's condemnation on the sinful people.

Remember what Isaiah said to the sinful people of God in ch 5? Six woes!

But listen. One glimpse of a holy God, and what happened?

"I am undone"--The word means to "disintegrate," to "come apart at the seams." When Isaiah saw God's holiness, and looked at his sinfulness, he crumbled.

What did Isaiah say was his problem?

"I am a man of unclean lips"--I have a dirty mouth! And not just me...

"I dwell in the midst of a people...with dirty mouths!"

Objection: Wait a minute. I find it hard to believe that Isaiah had a foul mouth. He didn't tell dirty stories, did he? He didn't swear, did he?

No. In fact, he probably had the best mouth in the 8th century BC. He was moral. He was upright. He was honest. He was a prophet.

But when Isaiah saw the holiness of God, he cursed himself! Woe is me! Why? Because when Isaiah saw a holy God, he had a standard by which to judge himself. Compared to God's holy standard, he realized his mouth was filthy, just like everybody else's. And the reason his mouth was filthy was because his heart was filthy (Jesus said, "Out of the heart, the mouth speaks...")

Problem: Some people refuse to see their need for Jesus Christ. "My life isn't so bad. In fact, my life is better than many so called Christians."

Key: You may be impressed when you compare yourself with another person. But how do you look when compared with the Holy God?

Common Ideas: "Well nobody's perfect. Everybody's entitled to one mistake!" Says who? Not God. Isaiah came to understand himself when he saw the holiness of God.

Is studying God's holiness *practical*? John Piper shared the following in a biographical sketch on Jonathan Edwards:

"About five years ago during our January prayer week, I decided to preach on the holiness of God from Isaiah 6. And I resolved on the first Sunday of the year to take the first four verses of that chapter and unfold the vision of God's holiness..."

So I preached on the holiness of God and did my best to display the majesty and glory of such an

unapproachably holy God. I gave not one word of application to the lives of our people (not a good practice regularly).

Little did I know that in the week prior to this message one of the young families of our church discovered that their child was being sexually abused for over a year by a close relative. It was incredibly devastating. There was police involvement. Social workers. Psychiatrists. Doctors. They were there that Sunday morning and sat under that message.

I wonder how many advisers to us pastors today would have said, Piper, can't you see your people are hurting? Can't you come down out of your ivory tower of theology and get practical? Don't you realize what kind of people sit in front of you on Sunday?

Several months later the sad details began to come out. And the husband came to me one Sunday after a service and took me aside, and said, "John, these have been the hardest months of our lives. You know what has gotten me through? The vision of the greatness of God's holiness that you gave me the first week of January. It has been the rock we could stand on." [2]

Response:

God is holy. What is the right way to respond to God's holiness?

Isa 57:15 "Thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy...I dwell...with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit..."

The word contrite in the noun form refers to "dust" or that which has been "pulverized." In the verb form it means "to be crushed, broken in pieces, or shattered."

God is holy. What person is on right standing with a holy God. We'll see next week in Isaiah 6. But for now, let's recognize this. When we see God as He is, there is only one acceptable response. That is broken humility. That is the admission of total and absolute spiritual bankruptcy.

******Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] I am indebted to the teaching of R. C Sproul for many of the insights shared in this series of messages. I highly recommend his video series and book on the subject.

[2] http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1458_The_Pastor_as_Theologian/