

Isaiah 6:1-8 “Beholding the Greatness of God: A Thanksgiving Message”^{**1}

Main Idea: In Isaiah 6:1-8, we are confronted with the greatness of God. In this passage, Isaiah was confronted by the greatness of God and specifically His holiness, and was never the same again.

I. To be gripped by the greatness of God, we need to see what Isaiah saw (1-2).

A. He saw the Lord (1).

B. He saw the seraphim (2).

II. To be gripped by the greatness of God, we need to hear what Isaiah heard (3-4).

A. The seraphim called attention to God's holiness.

B. The seraphim called attention to God's glory.

III. Once gripped by the greatness of God, we need to do what Isaiah did (5-8).

A. We must admit our guilt (5).

B. We must accept His cleansing (6-7).

C. We must avail ourselves for service (8).

Make It Personal: Is the Great One truly great in my life?

1. How does my view of the Great One need to change?

2. Are there things in my life that are making the Great One seem small?

Nepal Reflections: I'd like to begin today's message with a picture and some reflections from Nepal. Here's the picture (see end of message). And here are the reflections which I dictated to myself one night in Nepal.

“Thoughts about the great Mount Everest and the great God at 2 AM on Friday night, November 12, 2021. Yesterday I took a picture that I am thinking about tonight as I lay on my bed in Dharan Nepal.

Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in the world. It is bigger than Mount Makalu (27,766 feet), and bigger than Mount Lhotse (27,940 feet), the other two mountains in the picture. But when I was standing near Dharan on Nepal, the other two mountains appeared larger than Mount Everest. Why?

For one reason, Mount Everest is further away. When we are not near God, other things seem bigger than him.

For another reason, Mount Lhotse was in front of Mount Everest. When we put other things in front of God, he then seems smaller to us, even very small. This does not change the fact that he is the biggest, but he does not seem so.

Why does the great God seem small to us? What causes this? What can be in our lives that makes God seem small? What must we do so that the great God truly is great in our eyes?

Why am I not seeing God in my life? One reason is because I'm looking at something else that seems so big to me, so important. I am looking at Mount Makalu.

Another reason is because there is something in front of him. Like Mount Lhotse, that blocks my view of God. Perhaps it is a person. Or an aspiration. A job. A church.

For some people, it's as if the mountain isn't even there. They don't see Mount Everest. He seems to be such a small little triangle in the events of life. Perhaps just a tiny part of Mount Lhotse. In order to see this photo, someone else must show him to you. When you first see him, he does not seem very big. But as you keep looking, and you keep learning, you find out that he indeed is bigger than all the rest.

**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 For a previous look at this text, see the sermons preached at WBC on 8/27/2000 and 7/6/14.

The greatest being in the universe is God Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the book of Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah saw the Lord and he was high and lifted up. This is the greatest one. When you truly see him, you fall before feeling your total smallest. You are totally dependent upon him to rescue you, to lift you up. And this he does. He provides atonement for you. And once you receive it, you adore him, you serve him, you make him great in your life. Like Isaiah did.

Psalm 95 says that God holds the mountains in his hands. My cousin Brian shared this with me today. How great is God! And yet He, the Great One, climbed a mountain one day, Mount Moriah. And on that mountain the Great One became very small. Yet through his smallness, he broke the power of the trivial big things that hold us captive.

Most people are impressed with the sandunes of life, which seem so big to them, but they do not last. They cannot last, and in time they shift and change and go away. Take your eyes off of the sandunes of life, and fix your eyes on mount Everest.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

God is great. Moses and Miriam pondered His greatness in their song in Exodus 15, "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you--majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders (Exodus 15:11)?"

Yes, God is great. But let me be more specific. What is the great God's *greatest* attribute? What sets God apart from all else? In my estimation God's greatest attribute is also the attribute of God we most ignore. And perhaps the one we least understand.

His *holiness*. Remember Hannah? She was the childless woman that bore the miracle child, Samuel. At his dedication Hannah prayed as follows in 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."

We need fresh encounters with the greatness of God, and perhaps no one in the biblical record is more qualified to speak to us on the subject than Isaiah. A little over twenty-seven hundred ago, Isaiah had a confrontation with the greatness of God and was never the same again.

Just who was Isaiah? Isaiah was a prophet of God in the southern kingdom of Judah. 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 eighth century B.C.

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem. He had direct access to the political leaders of his day. In fact, he ministered for over sixty years, during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1), and possibly Manasseh. Those may be meaningless names to us, but know this. Isaiah lived during a pivotal time in Israel's history.

In chapter 6, Isaiah relates his call to the ministry. When did it take place? Verse 1, "In the year that King Uzziah died."

Please don't gloss over that. God called Isaiah to the ministry in the year that Uzziah died. Who was Uzziah, and what kind of king was he?

Let's plug in some dates. Uzziah reigned in Judah from 790-739 B.C. Isaiah ministered as a prophet from 740-680 B.C.

Uzziah (also known as Azariah) was one of the top five 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 fifty 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? About the same way you feel about your country.

Why? It wasn't just the political instability. The real problem was moral. The people to whom Isaiah was called to minister were morally corrupt.

How bad was it? Isaiah tells us in the first five chapters of his book. He begins his book in 1:2-4, "Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.' Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him."

How would you like to preach to a crowd like that? This was Isaiah's task. He preached, but they wouldn't listen. It was so bad he even tried to sing a song to get his message across, a little ballad about a vineyard in chapter 5.

"What more could I have done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad (5:4)?"

Things were bleak, so much so that Isaiah proclaimed six "woes" upon his people, as recorded in the second section of chapter 5: "Woe to those who add house to house (8)." "Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks (11)." "Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit (18)."

Woe, woe, woe. There's the situation in which Isaiah found himself. He lived in a morally decadent nation. And what he thought to be the last ray of hope, King Uzziah, just died.

But then it happened. Isaiah confronted the holiness of the great God and was never the same again. Isaiah experienced three things that he records in verses 1-8. And I would suggest that what Isaiah experienced is precisely what we need to experience. Three things, which appear in three scenes.

I. To be gripped by the greatness of God, we need to see what Isaiah saw (1-2).

The prophet's eyes focused on two sights that overwhelmed him. First...

A. Isaiah saw the Lord (1). "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple."

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

But when Isaiah saw God, he was absolutely terrified.

Notice his admission. "I saw the Lord," he says. Who did he see? The "Lord."

In our English Bibles there are two similar titles for God in the Old Testament. The first is "LORD" (all capitals). It's used when the Hebrew word "Yahweh" appears, the sacred name of God (as in verse 5). That's God's covenant name.

The other title is "Lord" (only the "L" is capitalized). It's used when the Hebrew word "Adonai" is present. It portrays God as majesty, one who is exalted, the *sovereign One*. That's the term Isaiah uses in verse 1.

Don't miss that. Apparently Isaiah went into the temple. When he entered he was full of doubts and questions since his king had just died. But then he had a vision of the throne room of heaven. He says he saw "the Lord." He entered the presence of *the sovereign One, the ruler of the universe*.

And what was the Lord doing? Wringing his hands? Pacing nervously? No. Sitting.

Sitting where? Sitting in seclusion in an easy chair? No. Sitting on a *throne*. I think that Isaiah actually saw a glimpse of the preincarnate Christ Himself sitting on His heavenly throne (John 12:41).

I appreciate R. C. Sproul's book, *The Holiness of God*, and I'll be citing several of his observations throughout this message. Here's one. In ancient times clothing was a status symbol for rulers. So what struck Isaiah about the Lord and His wardrobe? He says, "The train of his robe filled the temple." Wow! His train was not just long. It actually filled the temple! Isaiah struggles to find words that communicate the majesty he saw.

I think a lot of people are a little uneasy about the political climate in our country right now. 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!

Then something else caught the prophet's eye.

B. Isaiah saw the Seraphim (2). "Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying."

This is the only reference to "seraphs" (the Hebrew is *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. Their *wings*. "Each had six wings," he said.

Why do they have six wings? They fly with two. What about the other four? God doesn't waste what He creates. The Creator gives the creature what is suitable for his environment.

What does the creature that serves in the very presence of God need? He needs two extra sets of wings. What for?

The seraphim use two wings to cover their faces. Why? To protect their eyes from the brilliance of God's presence!

Do you remember what Moses asked God in Exodus 33:18? "Show me Your glory," was Moses' request.

What did God say? "No man shall see Me, and live (33:20)." You can't see My glory, Moses. It would destroy you.

But what did God do? He placed Moses in a cleft in a rock and permitted him to see His "back" (33:23). The Hebrew word means "hindparts." John MacArthur calls it His "afterglow." That's all you'll be able to handle, Moses!

And what happened when Moses saw God's backside? "Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped (34:8)."

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!

They also use two wings to cover their feet. Why? Feet are a symbol of creatureliness. Do you remember what God told Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:5? "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing 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, and then he saw the fiery seraphim. What he saw was astounding, but what impacted Isaiah even more was what he *heard*.

II. To be gripped by the greatness of God, we need to hear what Isaiah heard (3-4).

The most incredible thing about the seraphim was not what they looked like, but what they said.

Verse 3, "And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'" What was the twofold theme of the seraphim? First of all...

A. The seraphim called attention to God's holiness. 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:

For instance, Jesus often began his discourses, "Verily, verily, I say unto you" (or "Amen, Amen"). Why the repetition? For emphasis. Everything Jesus said was important, but when He said "Verily, verily," He was preparing for the punch line.²

In all the Bible, only one attribute of God 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 portrays His very essence. God's greatest attribute is His holiness.

But there's another theme in the song of the seraphim. In addition to His holiness...

B. The seraphim called attention to God's glory. "The whole earth is full of his glory." The Hebrew word for "glory," *kabod*, comes from a root that means, "to be solid, heavy." It speaks of God's importance. The seraphim announce that God's importance isn't restricted to the temple. The *whole earth* is full of His glory.

So holiness. And glory.

Now an important question. Just what does it mean to say that God is *holy*? Does it mean that He's perfect, that He never makes mistakes? Yes, but more than that.

²Paul used similar repetition in Galatians 1:8-9, "let him be accursed...let him be accursed."

Fundamentally, the Hebrew word *qadosh* means *distinct*. Holiness is *distinctness*.³ It speaks of the terrifying "otherness" of God. He is separate from His creation. He is one of a kind. He is in a class all by Himself. And you don't meander into His presence.

In fact, if you want to see what happens in the presence of a holy God, look at verse 4, "At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke."

The temple trembled. Even inanimate objects like door posts are shaken by God's holiness and majesty.⁴

Isaiah thought he was in an earthquake. The sound of the seraphim caused the doorways to rock, and the prophet 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.

Is that how you view God? What thoughts were going through your mind a few moments ago when we sang about the Lord? 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 the attribute most central to God's being, the one the seraphim were created to extol. God is holy.

Why is the American Church so filled with activity today, yet by and large so powerless and ineffective? Based on what Isaiah heard, let me suggest two reasons.

1. *We are plagued by a shallow view of God.* If we're honest about it, most of us don't know God very well. And what's more, we don't *want* to know Him very well or we'd take steps to get to know Him. We'd make church a priority instead of an option. We'd carve out daily time to be in His Word and prayer. We'd read and re-read solid books like J. I. Packer's *Knowing God*, and Tozer's *The Pursuit of God*, and Colson's *Loving God*, and Piper's *Desiring God*, and Stephen Charnock's *The Existence and Attributes of God*. We'd do that *if* we really wanted to know Him.

Men, if you want to know about hunting, you become a serious student of the subject. Right? You read. You talk to people. You make time for the pursuit.

Ladies, the same goes for crafts. Young people, maybe for you it's sports, or music, or computer games.

I'm convinced that we do what we *value*. So if we truly value God, it will show up in what we do. Or if we value personal comfort, that too will show up. That's one reason the American Church is shallow and powerless.

If the church valued God, it would devote particular attention to its prayer meetings.

2. *We don't understand His holiness.* To a lot of church goers, God is a great Genie in the sky. We have the notion that He exists for us, that 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 fifty years of ministry, Isaiah never lost sight of God's holiness.

³John Oswalt develops this in his commentary, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 1, pp. 180-1.

⁴I'm indebted to R. C. Sproul's book (and video series), "The Holiness of God." I'll be sharing several of his observations throughout this message.

Want to guess what Isaiah's favorite title for God is in his book? He uses it 26 times in the book of Isaiah (and it appears only six times in rest of OT!). Listen to 12:6, "Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."⁵

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. Nothing compares with Him. Nothing should rival Him in our lives.

This theme dominates Isaiah's message. We see it in 45:11-12, "This is what the LORD says--the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker; Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts."

And we see it in 45:22, "Turn to me and be saved all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."

Friends, there is only one God. And there is only one way to be right with God, by being *saved*. That's what He says. *Turn to Me and be saved*.

And of course, that's why He sent His Son into the world, Jesus the Messiah. So that unholy sinners could be made right with the Holy One. How? Just read the four gospels and you'll see. The God-man lived a holy life, and died the sinner's death, and conquered death. And He did it all in the place of those who would repent and believe in Him.

Now, if you'd been in Isaiah's shoes that day, what do you think you would have done? That brings us to scene 3.

III. Once gripped by the greatness of God, we need to do what Isaiah did (5-8).

Having seen God, did Isaiah say, "Man, I must be special. God appeared to me. I must be a pretty good guy in His sight." No.

Verse 5, "Woe to me! I cried. 'I am ruined!' For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

"Woe is me." Stop there. Isaiah was a prophet. A prophet's job was to deliver God's message to people. Prophets delivered two kinds of messages, *good* news and *bad* news. When a prophet began a message of good news, he started with the word, "Blessed" (like Jesus did in the 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 chapter 5? He uttered six woes!

But notice. Isaiah experienced one glimpse of a holy God, and what happened? He pronounced a woe upon Himself.

"I am ruined ["undone" in the KJV]," he said. 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 live among a people with dirty mouths!"

⁵See Isaiah 10:20 & 41:14, 16 for examples.

Wait a minute. I find it hard to believe that Isaiah had a foul mouth. He didn't tell dirty jokes, did he? Or use profanity?

No. In fact, he probably had one of the *best* mouths in the eighth century B.C. He was very moral, and upright, and honest. He was a *prophet*.

But when this man of God saw the holiness of God, he responded by cursing himself! Woe is me! Why? Because when Isaiah saw a holy God, he now had the perfect standard by which to judge himself. And 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.

That's what Jesus later said, right? "Out of the heart, the mouth speaks." So if your mouth is dirty, it's because your heart is dirty.

Listen. Some people refuse to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, and if you ask them why they'll say, "My life isn't so bad. In fact, my life is better than many so called Christians." You may be such a person, and if so, listen carefully.

When you compare yourself with other people, you feel pretty good about yourself. But have you ever compared yourself with the holy God?

"Well, He understands that nobody's perfect," you say. "That everybody's entitled to a few mistakes."

Says who? Is that what God says? Show me where. No, my friend. You're building your hope on a fallacy.

Here is reality. When a good man, namely Isaiah, saw God, and specifically saw God's holiness, he immediately saw himself in a different light. And he was petrified.

You say, "Well, if God is holy, how can sinners like us ever be right with Him?" We don't need to wonder, for Isaiah himself discovered the answer and shares it with us in verses 5-8. There are three steps we need to take if we are to be right with a holy God.

A. Admit your guilt (5). Like Isaiah did.

Guilt? That's something that people who've done really bad things have, right?

Again, the man we're considering was probably one of, if not *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. He cried out, "Woe is me. Curse me! Pronounce judgment on me!" And why?

"I am undone," he says. I'm coming apart at the seams and disintegrating. Why?

"I am a man of unclean lips," he says. I have a dirty mouth, a reflection of my dirty heart. And here's why.

"For my 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. It's society's fault." No.

He simply admitted his guilt.

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

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.

That's step 1. Isaiah admitted his guilt.

What did God do? Did God say, "Isaiah, you're being too hard on yourself. I think you're a really good person."

No. Neither did He say, "Suffer you miserable person. Wallow in your guilt. You deserve it." No. God's response is neither sentimental nor tyrannical. Instead, it's grace.

Watch what God did. He sent His messengers on a mission of mercy. Verses 6-7, "Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'"

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

B. 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.

The seraph took the fiery coal from the altar. What altar? Possibly the altar of incense which stood just in front of the Holy of holies. Leviticus 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. But atonement is possible only through sacrifice. God does not ignore sin. He forgives sin, but forgiveness demands sacrifice.

Watch this. What did the seraph do with that white hot coal? He touched Isaiah's mouth with it.

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

What was Isaiah's problem? According to his own admission (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."

So God touched Isaiah at his point of need.

And what happened when the fiery coal touched Isaiah's mouth? The coal cauterized his lips, and brought healing to his mouth and cleansing to his dirty heart.

How do we know that? Because the seraph said so at the end of verse 7 (as the KJV puts it), "Lo, this has touched your lips...thine iniquity is taken away."

There's a powerful lesson here, beloved, and we must not miss it. When it comes to holiness, two things are true...

1. *Holiness is something we cannot earn.* Rather...

2. *Holiness is something we must receive.* By grace through faith.

You'll notice that Isaiah is completely passive in this account. He didn't initiate the cleansing. He didn't ask for it. God simply gave it to him. That's grace.

And so is this. The seraph announced to Isaiah, "You don't have to curse yourself any longer. Your guilt is gone."

Gone!

You say, "That live coal must have hurt!" Again, my friend, a sinner does nothing to make himself right with a holy God. But he must die to himself. And death to self is always painful.

Let me be clear. It's not a coal from an altar that we need. It's what this atoning coal anticipates, namely the atoning cross of Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, the cross of Jesus is the live coal that must touch our lives, for when it does, it (and it alone) makes us pure.

Do you know why Jesus Christ died on the cross? It's 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 an acceptable substitute.

How can sinful people like us be right with a holy God? There's only one way. We must accept The Substitute that God sent to provide 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 what Isaiah himself said later in 64:6, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

No, we can't make ourselves holy. Only God can make us holy. We can't earn holiness, but must *receive* it. How? Like Isaiah, we must *admit* our guilt, and then we must *accept* God's cleansing by trusting in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, the One who died for our sins and rose again.

Is that all there is to it? Yes and no. By the end of verse 7, Isaiah is cleansed. By the grace of God his guilt is gone. But God isn't done with him.

What happens after God cleanses a sinner? Does God erase our guilt so we can go do our own thing the rest of our lives? No. That's the message of cheap grace, and that's not the gospel.

There was a third step in Isaiah's experience that shows us how we ought to respond as sinners when God cleanses us. First, admit your guilt. Then, accept His cleansing.

C. Avail yourself for service (8). "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'"

Who's speaking? God is.

And what's Isaiah's response? "And I said, 'Here am I. Send me (8)!' And God said (9), '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? Grace did. Because of God's grace a sinful man did three things. He admitted his guilt before a holy God. He accepted the cleansing provided by that holy God. And then he availed himself for service to that holy God.

Notice that Isaiah is thrilled with the privilege of serving God. Are you?

Show me a person who has to have his arm twisted so he will use his time and energy and money for the Lord, and I'll show you a person who isn't thinking about the grace of the Great God.

Here's a person who is amazed by grace. He's offering what he has for God's purposes. Not because he has to, but because he *wants* to.

On the same day I recorded the thoughts from Nepal that I shared at the beginning of this message, I met a man from Nepal who served in the Air Force in India. He was a Hindu until age 50. The Lord Jesus was not in his life. I asked him how he came to Christ. He said that he did not come to Christ but Christ came to him! His wife had fasted and prayed for him two days a week, and then Christ made himself known to him, and he changed him. He changed how he viewed his money and position. Now he wants to use everything that he has for the glory of the Lord. And so he purchased property, has build a church building. And is building a retreat center where people can come and learn about the The God who has given us his word. "People need to hear the word of God!" he told me. I asked him if he built this retreat center as a source of income. He said no! This place is so that people can come and hear the word of God! This is their greatest need.

When God is truly great in our lives, we do things to make him great in other people's lives. We use our money our time, our experiences, our talents, everything!

My friend, if you don't want to serve God, it's because you're not amazed by grace. Maybe you never were. Or maybe you've lost sight of it. But once we grasp how little we deserve the divine blessings we enjoy, then serving the Giver of those blessings is the most natural response in the world.

And that's what this blessed sinner, and this blessed church, and this blessed country, needs to see.

Make It Personal: Is the Great One truly great in my life?

1. *How does my view of the Great One need to change?*
2. *Are there things in my life that are making the Great One seem small?*

Closing Song: "Holy, Holy, Holy" (#262, all four verses)

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning's message from Isaiah 6:1-8 was entitled, "*Beholding the Greatness of God: A Thanksgiving Message.*" Take time to read again this stunning account of the time that Isaiah saw God. Then take time to read the outline of this morning's message.
2. What effect does this passage have on you? What truth most encourages you? What insight most challenges you? What questions does it raise?
3. If God is so great, and He certainly was in the eyes of Isaiah, what are some reasons why He might seem so small to us? And if He does seem small, what's the solution?
4. This is Thanksgiving weekend. It is the perfect time to stop and reflect on what we have seen the Great One do this year. What has He done to demonstrate His greatness in your life? In your family? In our church? In our world? Take time to share these reflections with the group, and then give thanks to the Great One for what He has done!

5. One of the most amazing demonstrations of God’s greatness is when He saves a sinner. Have a couple people in your group share their salvation story, to the praise of the Great One!



Photo taken from highest point near Dharan Nepal. Mount Lhotse is the mountain with the flat top on the left. Mount Makalu is the “bigger” mountain on the right. Mount Everest is the tiny triangle that seems to sit on the top/center of Mount Lhotse.