

**SERMON NOTES**  
**Isaiah 6:1-10**  
***“Holy, Holy, Holy”***

**Intro:**

- *“Suppose you were told that there was a tiger in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear.*
- **But if you were told “There is a ghost in the next room,” and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind. It would not be based on the knowledge of danger, for no one is primarily afraid of what a ghost may do to him, but of the mere fact that it is a ghost. It is “uncanny” rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous.**
- *Now suppose that you were told simply “There is a mighty spirit in the room” and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger: but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking – described as awe, and the object which excites it is the Numinous.”*
- (C.S.Lewis’ illustration of the Rudolph Otto’s concept of Numinous Dread)
- **Numinous Dread or awe is what human beings experience when they encounter *The Holy One* –in whose Presence we are as nothing and indeed are unworthy and unfit even to approach His majesty**
- ***Awe is a mixture of reverence, dread and wonder***
- **Our age knows little of holiness or awe or the fear of God**
- ***Awesome has become a synonym for “cool” or “amazing” or “incredible”***
- **When “awesome” becomes common, the fear of God disappears**
- ***And the fear of God has all but disappeared in our culture – including in our evangelical church culture***
- **What’s to fear? *God is love // God is merciful // God is non-judgmental // God is tolerant // God is nice // God is harmless //***
- **You won’t find many people under the age of 30 in our society – *in or out of the church* – who have much of any concept of the fear of God**
- **This week I read in a commentary a statement that stunned – and grieved – and humbled – me**

- ***“Modern evangelical theology has become dangerously one-sided, and this is especially apparent in American public life. At the same time that evangelicalism has become the dominant expression of Christian faith in America – public morality has collapsed...”***
- ***“The believer can easily feel that in the end his or her actual behavior is of little significance (since we are accepted as righteous by God’s grace through faith alone). If this is then coupled with a false idea of the security of the believer, the effect can be pernicious. We can essentially live in conscious sin, secure in the fact that God sees us as righteous and that we can never lose our salvation. Thus, we see persons in the highest offices in the land claiming to be “born-again Christians” (or pro-family conservatives) while living lives of conspicuous immorality and showing neither remorse nor repentance when caught.***
- ***“How we need to hear Isaiah’s excoriation of such behavior: The people of God must manifest the life of God or give up the right to be called the people of God.”***
- ***We can’t blame the liberals // we can’t blame the Catholics or Jews or Muslims or illegal immigrants or gays or socialists or any other scapegoats***
- ***Since 1976 the dominant, fastest-growing, most politically influential religious group in America has been us – conservative evangelicals***
- ***Almost all of the mega-churches in America are evangelical churches***
- ***Almost all of the religious radio and religious TV programming in America is evangelical and conservative***
- ***Our society has been spiraling downward in moral decline during our watch***
- ***Yet we continue to point the finger of blame everywhere else but at the very people called by God to be salt and light in society – namely, us***
- ***Those of us who name the Name of Jesus have not been manifesting the Holiness of God in our lives and in our churches – and the culture around us is decaying as a result***
- ***Materialism and Sexual Immorality and Sports Idolatry and Divorce and Moral Relativism are as common in the church as without***
- ***Where is the holiness of God to be seen in the evangelical church?***
- ***That’s the issue we need to be focusing on more than on what the liberals are doing in Washington***
- ***The evangelical church needs a holiness-producing encounter with the holiness of God***
- ***Isaiah’s encounter with the holiness of God:***

## I. THE CONTEXT FOR THE ENCOUNTER

- *Isaiah dates his prophetic call and his encounter with The Holy One of Israel “in the year that King Uzziah died.”*
- *Uzziah reigned from 792 – 740 BC*
- *He was a godly and powerful king for most of his life, but then he became proud, and his pride led to his downfall*
- *He entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar – something that only the priests could do*
- *Uzziah ignored the stern warning of the priests and became enraged at them for daring to confront him, the king*
- *While the king was ranting and raving at the priests – the Lord – the Holy One of Israel – struck Uzziah with leprosy – and he remained a leper to the day he died – disqualified from ever entering the Temple again*
- *Judah was in a state of spiritual crisis and impending judgment when King Uzziah died*
- *The Judah of Isaiah’s day was characterized by Greed – greed for bigger houses and more land – resulting in the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer and ultimately being dispossessed*
- *The people were characterized by **Self-indulgence** – consumed with eating and drinking and partying and sexual immorality*
- *The people were characterized by **Moral Perversion***

**Isaiah 5:20 (NIV)** <sup>20</sup> Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

- *That which was declared to be wrong in God’s Word was now being regarded as right – and vice-versa*
- *They did whatever seemed right in their own eyes*
- *And Judah was characterized by **Social Injustice***
- *Instead of defending the widows and orphans and securing justice for the poor and helpless– the wealthy and powerful cared only about themselves and preserving their own wealth and power and status*
- **Greed // Self-indulgence // Moral perversion // Social injustice – 8<sup>th</sup> cent BC Judah sounds a little like 21<sup>st</sup> century America, doesn’t it?**

## II. ENCOUNTERING THE HOLY, HOLY, HOLY GOD

**Isaiah 6:1 - 4 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” <sup>4</sup>At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

- *I saw the Lord – Adonai*
- **Of course, no one has ever seen God in His essential Being since He is invisible Spirit**
- *But God somehow manifested His Presence to Isaiah in some form that could be seen*
- **Yet there is no description of God Himself – only of the throne and the robe and the seraphim worshiping Him**
- *We are told that the train of his robe – similar in concept to the train of a wedding gown – filled the temple – emphasizing the grandeur of His majesty as King of the Universe*
  
- *The Lord was seated on a throne – He is the Sovereign King of the Universe no matter who was in power in Jerusalem – or Nineveh – or Babylon – or Rome – or Washington*
  
- **The Sovereign Lord is high and exalted – He is the Transcendent Creator and Ruler of the Universe– the Only Self-Existent Being – I AM WHO I AM**
- *God transcends Time – He is without beginning or end – there is no past, present or future with God – It is not just that His existence is eternal – but He does not exist within the bounds of time at all*
- **God transcends Space – He is Infinite – everywhere Present with His whole Being throughout His Creation, yet not bound by His creation**
- *God Transcends Matter – He is Spirit – He is distinct from the universe and is not to be identified with any part of His creation – the Uncaused Cause of everything else that exists in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible*
- **He is God**
- *He is not a superman or a super-angel or the chief god among a pantheon of gods*
- **He is God – the One and Only God**
  
- **God is the ultimate reality behind all things – and there is – and can be – only one such reality**
- *God Is Who He Is*

- This modern idea that God is whoever we want him to be – *or that there are different gods for different people* – or if I don't like the God Who Is There, then I can just believe in a god of my own making – is just plain silly
- *Of course, you are free to believe in a god of your own liking* – only one problem: *make-believe gods are not real and make-believe gods can't do a thing for you*
- **The Holy One of Israel is not just the God of the Jews – He is the Sovereign King of the Universe – and there is no other God**
- ***Holy, Holy, Holy is Yahweh – the King of Heaven's Armies – the whole earth is full of His glory***
- These most glorious of all angels next to the throne of God were not content to exclaim “Holy” – or even “Holy, Holy” – *they take it to the third degree – the superlative degree – HOLY! HOLY! HOLY!*
- These seraphs are of the highest rank or order of angelic beings since they are closest to God and to His throne
- *The word for seraph in Hebrew means “burning ones”*
- Our God is a consuming fire who often manifests His presence by means of fire – as in the burning bush to Moses – and on Mt. Sinai:

**Exodus 24:17 (NIV)** <sup>17</sup>To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.

- **If our God is a consuming fire then it makes sense that those angelic creatures closest to Him would be called “burning ones”**
- If Isaiah had seen only these seraphs – *the sight of these flaming spirits alone would have caused Isaiah to bow and prostrate himself in numinous dread before these glorious beings*
- It has been said that when most men think of God – their concept of God is actually closer to the reality of what angels are like
- ***God Himself far transcends our highest thoughts of Him***
- Again and again when humans see angels in their glory – humans respond with numinous dread and awestruck worship
- ***Even the Apostle John who had seen a vision of the glorified Christ, had to be commanded by an angel not to fall down and worship the angel but rather to worship God alone***

- And yet what are these glorious beings doing at the throne of God?
- *Covering themselves*
- ***With two wings they covered their faces and with two wings they covered their feet and with two wings they flew***
  
- **Even these glorious beings had to cover their faces before the Infinite Majesty of the Holy One of Israel so as not to look directly upon His glory**
- *Even these glorious beings – capable of being worshiped as gods by men – covered their feet to indicate that they were but creatures in the Glorious Presence of their Almighty Creator*
- **These fiery angels – capable of striking numinous dread into the heart of any human – capable of posing as gods to be worshiped by men – yet in the Presence of the One and Only True and Living God – the Holy One of Israel – could do nothing but call out in humble, awestruck worship: *Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty***
  
- **How then can we come so casually and carelessly and complacently into the Presence of the living God?**
  
- ***Holy, Holy, Holy!***
  
- **The holiness of God has a twofold meaning – He is holy in the sense that He is absolutely distinct and separate and wholly other than any of his creatures – exalted above them in infinite majesty – vastly superior even to the highest order of angelic beings who must cover their faces and feet in His Presence – not because these seraphs were sinful – for they were not – but just because God is God and they are not**
  
- **And secondly, the holiness of God refers to the Moral Perfection of God**
- *There is absolutely no sin or evil or imperfection or defect of any kind in The Holy One of Israel*
- ***And not only is He free from sin – but He is characterized by Moral Excellence in every attribute***
- ***His Love is Perfect and Most Excellent // His Righteousness and Justice are Perfect and Most Excellent // His Wisdom and His Compassion and His Mercy are Perfect and Most Excellent // His Patience and Kindness Are Perfect and Most Excellent // His Wrath against Sin is Perfect and Most Excellent***
  
- **There is no dichotomy between the Love of God and the Holiness of God**
- ***God's Love is a Holy Love***

- *If God were not Holy, then God's love would be like our love – imperfect, flawed, defective, disappointing, unreliable, often selfish and sometimes even hurtful*
- **It is precisely because God is Holy Love that He is a Jealous God**
- *No lover or husband worth his salt would tolerate his bride having an affair with another lover – especially if he knew that his love was far superior to the other man's love*
- **God offers us a vastly superior love – and a vastly superior joy – and a vastly superior purpose in life – and a vastly superior eternal destiny – to anything that can be found in Money or Sex or Sports or any of the other gods of this world**
- Therefore, God gets angry when we go chasing after these false gods
- **God is Jealous for the sake of His glory and for the sake of our good**
- *The proper response to God's holy love is absolute surrender and trust – to give our heart wholly and passionately to Him in full devotion*
- We often use terms to describe God that can also be applied to people: *God is good // God is just // God is compassionate // God is wise // God is merciful // God is loving // God is long-suffering // God is righteous*
- But we must not think that God's goodness is just like ours but a little better or that God's love or mercy or compassion or wisdom is just like ours but a little better
- *God is Holy – and therefore God's goodness is infinitely better than ours // His love is infinitely better than ours // His compassion is infinitely better // His wisdom is infinitely better // His faithfulness is infinitely better than ours*
- **God is holy – therefore He can be trusted – and loved**
- *And God is holy – therefore He is to be feared*

### III. ISAIAH'S RESPONSE

**Isaiah 6:5 (NIV)** <sup>5</sup>“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.”

- *Isaiah's integrity was unsurpassed by anyone in Judah – yet one glimpse of the holiness of God made him come apart at the seams*

- *To see the glory of God is to see our own sinfulness – and to be afraid of being consumed by God’s fiery judgment*
- *Isaiah saw who God was and then he saw who he was in contrast*
- *He was a man of unclean lips – He had a dirty mouth – and he lived among a people of unclean lips – and so he regards himself as doomed*
  
- *His mouth was likely cleaner than any of ours – but compared to the holiness of God – he was unclean*
  
- *The reason that many of us feel pretty good about our personal goodness and righteousness is that we tend to evaluate ourselves by comparing ourselves to other sinners*
- *But when we behold and contemplate the holiness of God – we see ourselves and our sins for what we really are*
  
- **Jesus taught that unclean speech comes from unclean hearts – our tongues reveal the spiritual condition of our heart**
  
- *Unclean speech is one of the most common sin areas – and blind spots – among religious people*
- *Even if we have cleaned up other areas of our lives pretty well, there are so many ways to sin with our words*
  
- *We hear a negative report about someone – perhaps someone we know or someone we have a conflict with – or perhaps a Christian leader or political leader – and we repeat that negative information or click forward on our email without making sure of these two things:*
  - Have I thoroughly checked the truth content of this information to make sure I am not bearing false witness or spreading false accusations against someone – perhaps damaging the reputation of a brother or sister in Christ?*
  - Even if the facts are true, is passing along this kind of information pleasing to the Lord? Are my words edifying? Wise? Christ-like in content, tone and spirit? Are my words worthy of an ambassador of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom?*
  - Or are these words proceeding from unclean lips and an unclean heart?**
  - Are these words betraying a critical spirit? A self-righteous, judgmental attitude? A disrespectful attitude toward leaders placed by God in authority over me? A holier-than-thou attitude toward other flawed human beings while glossing over my own flaws?*

- What proportion of our speech consists of complaining, grumbling, whining, fault-finding?
- *Are my words betraying an ungrateful attitude? A self-pitying, self-centered attitude? A sour attitude? A distrustful attitude? A resentful attitude? A bitter spirit?*
- **Are these words proceeding from unclean lips and an unclean heart?**
  
- *Do I consistently treat the name of God and of Jesus Christ as holy – or am I guilty of taking the Lord’s name in vain?*
- Am I desecrating the name of God by carelessly using it as a cuss word or an exclamation point?
- *Am I taking that which is holy and sacred and treating it as something common and profane?*
  
- Do you know that OT Jews regarded the name of God as so holy that they would not even pronounce His Name – Yahweh – when reading Scripture?
- *And even today many Jews refer to God as The Name rather than risk misusing His actual names*
  
- Contrast that with how carelessly the name of God crosses over the lips of many Christians today
- **There is an appropriate time and place and manner for saying “My God” – as the Psalms do and as Jesus did on the Cross – but these are not words to be said lightly or carelessly**
- Even when using the substitute word “Gosh” we need to be careful so as to avoid the kind of careless speech characteristic of those who have no fear of God and no concept of His Holiness
  
- *But there is another way we can take God’s name in vain – by misrepresenting Him when claiming to be speaking in His name*
- This was one reason why Jesus harshly criticized the Pharisees while never saying a critical word about the godless Roman Emperor or Senate
- *Caesar and the Roman Senate did not claim to be speaking for God – but the Pharisees did*
- We risk taking the Lord’s name in vain – *and do harm to the cause of the Gospel* – when Christians dogmatically present opinions on controversial political issues as though representing God’s View on subjects that are not clearly taught in the Bible

- *I now see that I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have now seen the Sovereign King, the Lord of heaven's armies, the Holy One of Israel*
- **Isaiah made no attempt to clean himself up in the Presence of the Holy One**
- *He made no excuses // He made no pleas // He made no promises*
- **He simply acknowledged that He was undone and doomed in the Presence of God's Holy Fire**
- **So God did for Isaiah what Isaiah could not do for himself**
- **God cleansed Isaiah's unclean lips**

**Isaiah 6:6 - 7 (NIV)** <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

- **What was Isaiah's role in this removal of the guilt and uncleanness of his sin?**
- *I am a sinner – I am undone – I stand condemned before the holiness of God – There is nothing I can do for myself to remedy the situation*
- **What was God's role in this removal of Isaiah's sin and guilt and uncleanness?**
- **It was all God's initiative and God's doing**
- *Isaiah's salvation was all of God and nothing of Isaiah*
- **God did everything that needed to be done**
- **God did not reveal His holiness to Isaiah in order to destroy him – but rather in order to cleanse him and to equip Him for service**
- *Acting mercifully through the burning seraphs – God touched Isaiah's unclean lips with a burning coal from the altar of sacrifice – in effect cauterizing Isaiah's lips and removing the uncleanness*
- **The altar was the place where atonement and propitiation was made for human sin**
- **To propitiate means to satisfy the Justice and placate the wrath of a holy God**
- **Propitiation must take place before the unclean can fellowship with The Holy**

- People who wonder why a merciful and loving God cannot just choose to turn the other way and tolerate human sinfulness do not understand the holiness of God
- *Uncleanness and holiness cannot co-exist any more than kindling wood and blazing fire can co-exist*
- **It is the very nature of holiness to consume that which is unclean or unrighteous**
- Isaiah understood that – that’s why he said: *Woe to me – I am undone*
  
- In the OT God provided the substitutionary sacrifices of animals to atone for human sins – as a temporary measure until God sent His Own Son as the Lamb of God to die on the Cross as the ultimate propitiation – *removing our sins by taking them into Himself – and suffering the just punishment for our sins in his own death – thus quenching God’s holy wrath against us sinners*
  
- **The Cross of Jesus Christ is our only refuge against the holy wrath of God which consumes all that is sinful and unclean**
- *The Cross of Jesus Christ is a “burned-over” place*
- You know how firefighters protect themselves in forest fires – they set a controlled fire in an area so that when the raging fire reaches that place there is no more fuel for the fire – *the forest fire cannot touch those who take refuge in the burned-over place*
- **On the Cross Jesus Christ suffered the fiery judgment of God’s holy wrath against human sin**
- *Thus the Cross is for us a “burned-over place” – we are saved from the wrath of God because our sins have already been burned up at the Cross*
- Jesus has done for us what we could not do for ourselves – He has cleansed us from our sins so that now we can enter the holy presence of God
  
- And what is our part in our salvation?
- *To acknowledge our uncleanness // to acknowledge that we are helpless to make ourselves clean // to believe that Christ’s death on the Cross is God’s only and sufficient provision to remove our uncleanness and make us clean and righteous in His sight // and to receive the gift of salvation offered to us by accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior*

#### IV. OUR CALL TO HOLINESS

- God does not cleanse us with the blood of Christ so that we can continue living in the filth of our sin

- ***God's purpose in creating us and in saving us is to bring us into relationship with Him so that He might share His character – His holiness – with us***

**1 Peter 1:15 - 16 (NIV)** <sup>15</sup>But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; <sup>16</sup>for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

- ***And pursuing holiness is not optional for Christians***

**Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)** <sup>14</sup>Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

- ***Yet this holiness which is our calling and which is necessary to see the Lord is not within our nature***
- ***How then can we obtain this holiness?***
- ***Whatever God demands, He provides***
- ***Holiness is part of the divine life that God imparts to us by His Spirit***

**2 Peter 1:3-5** As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive his own glory and goodness!

<sup>4</sup>And by that same mighty power, he has given us all of his rich and wonderful promises. He has promised that you will escape the decadence all around you caused by evil desires and that you will share in his divine nature.

<sup>5</sup>So make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence.

- ***Be holy, because I am holy – says the Holy One of Israel***
- ***Meaning – you ought to be holy because I am holy and you are called to reflect my likeness***
- ***And also – You can be holy because I am holy and my divine Spirit lives within you to enable you to reflect my likeness***
- ***Pursuing holiness does not mean merely refraining from sin – though that is part of it***
- ***God's holiness is manifested in an active righteousness and this is our calling as well***

**Isaiah 1:16-17** <sup>16</sup>Wash yourselves and be clean! Let me no longer see your evil deeds. Give up your wicked ways. <sup>17</sup>Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows.

- *That is what biblical holiness looks like*
- **The Father is seeking and preparing a bride for His Son**
- *The bride's garments are filthy – but one day – at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb – she will be given fine linen – bright and clean – and that fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints*

**Ephesians 5:25-27** He (Christ) gave up his life for her (the church) <sup>26</sup>to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's word. <sup>27</sup>He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

- ***Holiness is our calling and our destiny***
- ***Jesus died for you to cleanse you and make you holy***
- **God has given us His Spirit and His Word to make us clean and holy**
- ***You have divine life within your body***
- **That divine life of the Holy Spirit imparts a burning passion for holiness**
- ***Don't quench the Spirit – don't put out that flame – rather, feed that passion for holiness with the truth of who God is as revealed in the Scriptures***
- **As we gaze upon the glory of God in the face of Christ – and as we yield to the control of His Holy Spirit within us – we grow in Christ-like holiness**
- **May God increase our passion to be holy as He is holy**

Prayer

*“Revelation Song”*