

Scripture references from the ESV

*Isaiah 6:1-13* In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train<sup>[a]</sup> of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

<sup>8</sup> And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." <sup>9</sup> And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing,<sup>[c]</sup> but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' <sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

<sup>11</sup> Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people,

and the land is a desolate waste,<sup>12</sup> and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. <sup>13</sup> And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

### The greatest reality in the universe is God

Without God, nothing would exist, including you. Yet it is true to say that God is largely ignored in the world he governs, cares for and sustains. This is a tragedy and it means that we, as his church, have work to do. We, who have been saved by God, have been placed by him in communities in order to make God known and to show his worth and excellence. To do that we need to recapture and maintain our vision of God.

It is easy, in church life, to get diverted away from God and to focus on 'churchy things'. We can be like people who have a window out on to a stunning view, but who become more concerned about the window than the view.

### **The view that God gives us is the view of his glory**

The windows that help us see that glory are all the things we do in church life, and everything around us. As a church, to a measure, we have become more concerned to serve the windows (our activities) than to look through them to see the glory of God for the joy of our souls.

Nearly every generation faces this issue, and Isaiah was in the same situation that we are in. Israel had become prosperous but at the same time they had become complacent, forgetting that they owed it all to God. They still did their religious routines but

### **There was no awareness of God in those religious rituals**

God said of them: **This people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me.** (Is 29:13). Yet God moves by his grace. Firstly, he moves in Isaiah's heart so that he comes to see the glory of God and experience his grace, and then, having been confronted by God, Isaiah takes his message to the people.

**Only after Isaiah saw the glory of God could he be used by the Lord to speak of glory of God.**

If we are going to display the worth and excellence of God to our communities, then we need to move the focus of our eyes off the windows and on to the glory that the windows serve.

### **We need to see the glory of God.**

Three realities confronted Isaiah, and we need to be confronted by them too.

- 1. The reality of God's glory.** Isaiah had been in the temple many times to worship God, but this time God met with him in a truly remarkable way. What an amazing statement he makes in v1 – **I saw the Lord.**

When Moses wanted to see God's glory, God told him: **you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live** (Exodus 33:20). Yet Isaiah saw the Lord in the throne room of heaven. It was not a dream (v5). With his eyes, he saw the true king who

reigns not just over Judah but over the universe. He makes no attempt to give us a physical description because that would be impossible since the Bible tells us that God is spirit. Instead, he describes the other things he saw and heard, thereby giving us a description of the character of God. He saw:

- Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne that was high and lifted up (v1). It is lifted up over every human kingdom – Prime Ministers and Presidents, along with all of us, come under the rule of God.

**He is King over everything – there is no higher throne**

- Isaiah saw the train of the Lord's robe filling the temple (v1). The temple was central to the life of God's people – it was where he met with them and lived among them. The train filled the temple – it is all of God that comes to meet with his people. Today we are God's temple and he graciously condescends to live in us.

**God is present in ALL of his majesty at the centre of his people's lives**

**He FILLS us with himself in all his glory**

- Isaiah saw the angelic beings (v2). They are the King's attendants, who cover their faces and their feet in his presence and hold themselves in readiness to obey his commands. These sinless creatures are humbled before the presence of God. As we gather to worship God, he is being worshipped by these beings – do we adopt a similar posture to theirs as we come before him? We claim to know this holy God, yet so often we come into his presence with the same laid-back attitude that we have when we go anywhere else.

**Heaven worships its creator**

**Let this scene fill you with godly fear when you approach God.**

**It is the same God who will hear your prayers.**

- Isaiah heard the angelic beings (v3). They are delighting in singing the glories of God and their praise never stops. As we live out our lives on earth, these mighty beings are singing out the glories of God in a way that causes the temple foundations to shake (v4). Their song tells us that that God is utterly holy. Holy, holy, holy is not just repetition - it is emphasis. God is not a bigger and nicer version of us. He is in a different category.

## Heaven worships its creator

### The theme of their song is God's utter holiness

God's glory is not just displayed in heaven for angels to see and delight in. It fills the whole earth for all his creation to see and delight in. **The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.<sup>2</sup> Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.** (Psalm 19:1-2).

### In creation, God went public

God's delight in being God is so great that it spilled over into creation, so that human beings, too, could see God's holy, holy, holy character and delight in him. However, sin has blinded our eyes to the glory of God in creation – scientific explanations are given for all the wonders we see. It is only when the Holy Spirit gives us new life that we look at creation and say wow – don't we have an amazing God!

- What does Isaiah see?

**He sees the Lord,**

**the one who is the only King, who is utterly holy and who is worthy of the most thunderous praise.**

2. **The reality of our sin (v5).** Often, we do not see ourselves as the sinners that we are because we compare ourselves to others and then feel we are not that bad. We come into church and pray the prayer of the Pharisee: **'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'** (Luke 18:11-12). However, God says to us: **You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.** (Lev 19:2)

**The standard by which we are to measure ourselves is God himself.**

When you are confronted with the living God, you will find that you are not as holy as you thought you were.

That is exactly what happened to Isaiah, and his reaction was fear. When he was confronted with God in all his holiness, his sin was exposed. It was not just his sin that came under the spotlight, but that of the people around him.

**And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips,**

**and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King,  
the LORD of hosts!”(v5)**

I am lost literally means I am silenced. It seems that Isaiah wants to join in the praise of the angels, but he cannot because his sin excludes him from worshipping God with his mouth. He knows that he cannot sing that great song.

### **Isaiah is effectively excluded from heaven**

- Sin does this. It excludes us from heaven and from joining in the with the thunderous praise of the angels.

You might wonder what terrible thing Isaiah had done that means he cannot praise God. He had not stolen anything, made an idol of something, committed adultery or coveted anything.

### **His sin is that of unclean lips.**

Jesus tells us what this means (Mark 7:6): **“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,“This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;**

Despite all their religious activity, the hearts of the people were just not in it.

**Isaiah and his generation had been worshipping God with no awareness of his grandeur.**

Their words were empty words. They had not praised God from hearts captivated by God’s glory, because instead they gloried in themselves and their own achievements.

### **Sin blinds us to the glories of God**

- Sin causes us to lose sight of God’s majesty, and in exchange we worship and serve ourselves or our religious activities.
- Sin cuts our hearts off from this majestic God.
- Sin excludes us from heaven for all eternity.

Imagine Isaiah’s distress in this situation. What hope could he find and where can we find hope in our own distress?

**3. The reality of God’s grace (vv6-7).** Isaiah simply confessed his sin, and one of the seraphs, God’s obedient servants, came with a coal. Thus Isaiah was cleansed. In response to Isaiah’s confession of sin,

**God cleansed him and took away his guilt**

Isaiah was touched at the very point of his sin – on his unclean lips – and in the process, God made not just his lips, but the whole of him clean.

- How can this holy, holy, holy God cleanse sinners?

The coal came from the place of sacrifice, the altar. Later Isaiah wrote this about God's servant: **Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.<sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Is 53:4-6)**

The New Testament shows us that those words refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. God could forgive Isaiah and cleanse him because

**Jesus would be sacrificed as an offering for Isaiah's sin.**

What is true for Isaiah is true for all of us who have confessed our sin before God and trusted in Christ.

**Jesus was sacrificed as an offering for OUR sin**

In the taking of bread and wine, we celebrate what Christ has accomplished for us. He has borne our sin in his body:

- The sin of belittling God by failing to see his glory while we make more of the windows that are only there to enable us to see that glory
- The sin of coming to worship and just going through the motions, whilst having a heart that is far from God

Take time to consider how God has been speaking into your heart as you have worked through this and then take one thing that has particularly struck you.

Thank God for speaking to you and ask him to help you to do whatever he is asking you to do, and thank him for revealing himself to you.

- Jesus having borne our sin means that, as we confess that sin, we are now cleansed and able to join in the praise of God in heaven. We can sing the song of the angels:

**Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.**