

Sermon
Vision That Revives
Isaiah 6
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By the time we get to Isaiah 6, Isaiah had already been serving as a prophet. He was a spokesman for God for at least some of King Uzziah's reign, and now we come to the end of that reign.

One day, Isaiah went to the Temple for worship. And he was shocked to find God there. That day of a renewed vision of who God is changed his life forever...and our lives, too.

Maybe we are a little like Isaiah this morning. Have you come this morning expecting to encounter the Risen Christ, here with us, among us today? He is here; may he open our eyes and change us forever.

Isaiah 6:1–8

6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** 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. **3** And one called to another and said:

**"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"**

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. **5** 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!"

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

⁸And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Have you ever seen something that just changes you? I used to run in the mountains of Virginia, and getting to the crest of some of those mountains to see the Shenandoah Valley from above made all the misery of going up worth it. Sometimes seeing beauty afresh revives us a bit.

In the year King Uzziah died, God renewed Isaiah's vision of who God truly is. And it completely changed his life. He had the blessing of cresting the ridge. That **renewed** vision God gave him **revived** him and shaped the rest of his days. How?

The time reference, V 1. "**King Uzziah died**" provides one more reminder of the state of Judah. Uzziah's reign started off so well, then his pride got the best of him. He was a rock star King. Began reign at 16, reigned for 52 years! By the end of his reign, his pride had gotten the best of him, and the Lord struck him with leprosy. A leprous king symbolized a spiritually leprous people of God.

This was the context God met Isaiah. The long serving king was gone; the people were spiritually sick; everyone wondered what's next. In that moment, Isaiah crested the ridge to see, and God revived him. What will keep us going, will revive our spiritual lives, will capture our hearts to keep following hard after Christ?

1. Renewed Vision of God's glory shows us the extent of God's reign.

In contrast to a weak and leprous King Uzziah, Isaiah saw **the Lord on the throne, that is the King seated from where he rules over the world**. God was **high and lifted up, v. 1**, when Israel has trusted in Israel high and lifted up. The whole scene is filled with glory.

Above God, **v. 2 were these flying creatures called seraphim**, which literally means "burning ones" perhaps somewhat like giant flames. When we think of angels or cherubs, sometimes, we have that medieval image in our minds of chubby babies, soft and puffy, lingering about the clouds. But the reality is entirely different! When just **ONE** of these things speaks, **v. 4, the foundations of the thresholds shook**. These aren't happy little babies; these are powerful, loud, majestic beings, glorious flaming creatures! Don't think silly floating babies, think a formation of fighter jets on fire, flying about breaking the sound barrier.

Although they are sinless, **v. 2, they covered their eyes** with a set of wings to shield them from God's brilliance. **With two wings they covered their feet**, possibly in a posture of humility and commitment to use their feet only for what God sends them to do.

And they called out that **the whole earth is filled with God's glory**. This word glory is a bit hard to capture. It comes from a root word pointing to weight, heaviness, or burden. The whole earth is full of God's weight, or heaviness or importance. Yet, we may seek own glory or weighty importance, seeking to make a name for ourselves.

Do you know what ballast is? In a ship or a sailboat, you need ballast to keep it afloat. Ballast is some heavy thing that is put into the bottom of

the hull. With the heavy thing at the bottom, the weight pulls downward and keeps the boat upright, even in a strong wind threatening to topple the boat or high seas, the weight of the ballast keeps the boat afloat by its weight keeping the hull in the water.

Our lives, too, depend on a sort of ballasts, of glory, to keep us afloat, especially when the winds of difficulty blow, or the high seas of trial threaten to topple our lives. What do you depend on to keep your life upright? Or, what do you lean upon as your glory? Let me ask it this way. When life feels rocky, how do you fill in the blank: At least I still have my _____?

Sometimes we chase our glory, our ballast, in money and power. Life is falling apart at home, but at least people still listen to me at work. Or, this setback really hurts, but at least we have enough money to take care of ourselves. But the problem is, whatever we lean upon for glory or ballast, we have an insatiable desire to require more of it. How much of people listening to you at work, or how large must the savings account be for you to feel like YOU matter, are valuable and important? **More**, is the answer. Money and power can't serve as the glory or ballast to make life feel upright.

Or success and reputation. At least I still have my reputation. If your success and reputation are what you lean on to keep your life afloat, you will be a deeply insecure person. For success as glory or ballast will last only as long as your most recent victory or accomplishment.

Friends, these are good gifts, but the only glory that will truly keep your life afloat is God himself. The more we see our powerful and glorious God seated, ruling, on the throne, the more we see HIS power and love as what enables me to endure, the more life will remain upright in difficult and fearful times.

The reign of the King is spreading in your direction! Christ is taking over his world, ruling and reigning in you and through you; yield to him. **Whatever else is going on, At least I still have my God...and he is seated on the throne ruling and reigning for my good and his glory.**

John Gresham Machen once said, *"The more we know of God, the more unreservedly we will trust him; the greater our progress in theology, the simpler and more childlike will be our faith."* Do you want a revival of your soul? Think this afternoon upon this scene. Who he is. What he is doing. What his intention is for you.

2. Renewed vision of God's holiness works a new humility in us.

Again, the seraphim cry, v. 3 **Holy, holy, holy the whole earth is filled with his glory.** In English we use good, better, best. Hebrew repeats in order to get at superlative. Find threefold repetition here. There is no word, so they make up an expression to get at it. God is holy, in perfection, the highest of holiness.

But what does that mean? Sometimes when we try to think of what "holy" means, we think moral purity. That's part of it, but not the whole. Holiness is being devoted, or separate. The word comes from cutting apart to that it is distinct. When we talk about God's holiness, it means ALL his attributes are separate, distinct, set apart in perfection. In other words, his power is a holy power, a distinct type of power that is perfect in power. His mercy is a holy mercy, perfect and distinct from all else in mercy. His love is a holy love, perfect and set apart from all other expressions of love.

So these seraphim are crying out God is perfection X perfection X perfection. Isaiah realizes he doesn't belong in this company of the holy

and grows keenly aware of his need. God is infinite, and I am not; God is omnipotent, and I am not. God is omniscient, and and every other omni, and I am none of them! He was struck with the vast difference between himself as a sinful creature, and the Holy Creator.

⁵And 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!"

Now when he says this, Isaiah is saying to us this **renewed vision of God's holiness drives ME to humility**. How? Remember the six woes from chapter 5 last week? There were six bunches of the wild stink fruit of God's people, and with each descriptor, he pronounced a woe, a lament, a deep sorrow before God that **THEY** are like this. Now, in chapter 6 we have a seventh woe, 7 being the number of biblical completion. Isaiah says woe is...not them...but woe is **ME**. I am just like them; When I see the difference between you and me, God, I am exactly like them, not like you! When I see the vast difference between the holy God and a broken sinner, it is not worth comparing myself against other broken sinners.

He continues **I am Lost, or ruined, undone, or perhaps, coming apart, disintegrating**. In your light, I am coming apart at the seams, he says...because he sees himself as he truly is when compared with God's holiness.

We know what this feels like, right? When our pride is crushed? When I think I'm the smartest student in the room, and then you meet someone who scored a 1600 on their SAT. Oh, maybe I'm not.

Or, I'm the best artist I know...of my twelve friends who are artists. Then we go to the Art Museum and see Van Gogh, or a Caravaggio, and think, **OH, THAT** is what great art looks like. Or I'm a powerful woman or man; I

command a workplace of sixteen, then you meet a CEO of a multi-national corporation, and think maybe I'm not.

Isaiah's pride was smashed when he saw how foolish it is to compare himself with another sinful human and call himself good. When in the presence of Holy, Holy, Holy, the "I'm better than you other sinner game" is silly. **When I see ME as I am before a holy God, I am just like them.**

He continues, **I am a man of unclean lips and dwell among a people of unclean lips.** Isaiah is NOT saying I have a dirty mouth. Instead he's confessing two truths here. First, the mouth is the vehicle that expresses what is in the heart, as Jesus said. He's confessing, I have an unclean heart; WE have unclean hearts, all of us alike. I am sinful. But second, even my BEST offering is tainted with sin before you. Remember, Isaiah is a prophet. What tool do prophets use to serve the Lord? Their lips. They are the spokesmen for God. So, God, even when I am serving you, my life is tainted with sin. When I'm bad, I'm bad and repent. ALSO, even when I try to be good, I'm still affected by sin, Lord!

Having a renewed vision of God's holiness works a new humility in us. It will send us to our knees before God AND one another.

When we have a renewed vision of God's holiness, we may find that our marriages feel different. In my flesh, I think, if Missy would just get it straight, if she would just repent, then our marriage would be better. But seeing God's holiness frees us in humility to say, Not Really. The biggest problem in my marriage is me. God change me!

It frees us from our flesh that says if my co-workers would just do their jobs, then this company would be fantastic. When in reality, I am part of

the problem, too. Where, Lord, might you change me as part of the solution for a more healthy work place.

The Puritan Flavel wrote, "When corn is nearly ripe, it bows the head and stoops lower than when it was green. When the people of God are ripe for heaven, they grow more humble and self-denying."

Our hearts **MUST** be revived by having a fresh vision of God's holiness if we will stoop as humble servants. Can you say today with Isaiah, Woe is me, for I am just like them. Change me, Lord?

3. Renewed vision of God's grace moves us to give our lives away.

As we come to verse 6, Isaiah was likely terrified. **⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.**

Isaiah would have known what this meant. The burning coal is a reminder of the burnt offering on the altar, the place where the sacrifice to atone for sin was consumed. The coal reminded him that payment for sin is a life. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. This holiness I've witnessed requires death for rebellion, for our rebellion, for my rebellion. My sin requires my death!

⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

Instead of death, when the coal touched Isaiah's lips, his pardon was announced. His guilt removed. The death that was required of him was paid by another. His sin was atoned for, and he would live!

What a beautiful picture of grace. I am guilty and deserve punishment, but that debt has been paid by another. Another was sacrificed, that I live. That instead of being undone, of dis-integrated, I might be healed and put back together. This was just a picture, though, of the reality that was to come another time the Temple shook and the lamb was slain.

Matthew 27:45 ff tells us From the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. At that ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? When Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and at that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom and the earth shook and the rocks split.

As Jesus, the True Lamb of God hung upon the altar of the Cross, our woe, our sin, our guilt lay upon him that our sin would be atoned for. He died the death we deserve, that we may be washed clean in his blood. What a holy love! What grace the cross announces! You have stumbled into death because of your sin, but I shall take it, Jesus says. I have life eternal, and I shall give it!

Do you want a revival in your spiritual life? Remember that the holy one has come to you, has invaded your life, and has touched you to heal. The condemnation and death we fear, has been removed by the blood of the Lamb.

How do we respond to that renewed vision of his grace? **V. 8, The Lord says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then Isaiah said, "Here am I! Send me."**

The response to God's incredible grace is to say, God do with me what you want! I'm here for you to use me for your purposes rather than me somehow use you for my purposes. How do you call me to rearrange my

life around your priorities, Lord? Where do you want me to plug in and serve, to give away to others what you have given to me?

Here am I Lord, send me to volunteer in some ministry—to give of my time to shepherd or serve or bless someone else. Even if I have to rearrange my travel plans? Yes, Send me.

Here am I Lord, use my financial resources, not just what I count as left over and that I can spare. Here am I, use me. Arrange my life that what you have given me can be given away to bless another.

Here am I Lord, your grace sustained me when I made some bad mistakes in business, or relationships, or parenting. Put me in relationships, to purposefully share what you taught me that I might help someone else in their need. Use me.

God's grace puts us into a stewardship posture with our lives. All I have is yours. Use me how you see fit. You bought me with your grace, now let me live my life for you. What has God given you that you might give away?

Come up, the Lord says. "Come further up, and further in," as C.S. Lewis wrote, "that our lives may be revived by a fresh acquaintance with the Lord, our King." His glory will encourage you with the extent of his rule over you. His holiness will renew a humility within you. And his grace, will move you to give your life away. Come and see.