

A Man Who Saw God on the Throne

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon explores the profound implications of seeing God on His throne and the transformative effect it has on a believer's life.

Duration: 31:51

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-5, Isaiah 33:14-16, Ezekiel 1:4-5, Hebrews 12:29, James 1:17

Topics: "Sovereignty Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the holiness of God and the importance of hating sin. He describes God as actively hostile to sin and warns against being flippant about it. The preacher then reads from the book of Isaiah, describing a vision of God sitting on a throne, surrounded by seraphim. This vision leads the speaker to reflect on the transcendence of God and the role of the heart in seeking Him. The sermon concludes with a call for Christians to be both practical and open to the mystery of God, living as walking miracles.

Transcript

I think that I am responsible for the motto God uses, that I should like to explain that when I use the words, man got understood that God never uses anybody. God works in men and through them, but he never uses them. A company uses a salesman, sends him out on his own.

He always works in. It is God that worketh in us to will, and yet not I but Christ worked in me, Paul said. So actually what we're saying is the man works through.

Last, yesterday it was, I defined that man as a man who met God in the bush. Today I am to speak, and this is also by request, the man who saw God on the throne. And I'm in a bit of mental difficulty, not serious, just a little block about tomorrow, I'm not certain what I'll preach about tomorrow.

Probably, possibly at any rate, the man that God above the heavens. Now let me read this very familiar passage. In the year that King I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Above it stood the seraphims. Each one had six wings. With twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

He cried unto another and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

Then said I, woe is me, for I am unclean, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For mine eyes have seen the King. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off.

And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken, whom urge. Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, send me. And he said, go tell this people.

Now the man Isaiah here is trying to express that which we must inexpressible. He's trying to utter that which cannot be uttered, which is said by the theologians to be the inexpressible. And in trying to express what he sees, he's limited by at least three facts.

One is that what he saw was wholly other than, and altogether different from, ever seen before. You know that in our singing, praying, worshiping, preaching, and thinking, to draw a sharp line between that which is God, and all that which is not. And Isaiah had been familiar with that which was not God, all that God had created and made.

But up to here, he had never been introduced into the presence of the uncreated. And the contrast between that which is God, and that which is not God, the uncreated ambit was such that language staggered under the effort to express it. It's impossible, as you know, to conceive God.

I said something yesterday, I think I said neo-Orthodox, I meant to say neo-evangelical, in which I peed a little bit, complained a little bit about the people trying to grasp God with your intellect. Can't be done, we ought to wake up to the fact that if I could grasp God with my intellect, I would be equal to God. Never will be, never can be equal, and therefore I never can grasp God with my intellect.

And yet this man was trying to do it, and tried hard to set forth what he saw, and the words were clumsy and inadequate. Words are always so, they're clumsy. Inadequate to express that with which we are familiar, how much less then can they express that which is divine.

And God here was to the man. You see, there's a difference between between God revealing himself and man discovering. Bore by his intellect through to God, he couldn't do it in a million years.

Not all the pooled brains of the world could do it. And in one second time reveal himself to the spirit of the man. And so the man knows God, but he knows God experientially not.

So God revealed himself here, and everything that is written here was true, and is true. Says it's greater than what is written, by as much as God is greater than the human mind. Now the man of God said, I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, and I wish that I could make this vision to be at least dimly seen by those of the world, that God sits upon a throne.

Here he is upon a throne. We've gotten away from it now. It's an evidence of anthropomorphism.

I never was afraid of big words. The sticks and stones can never hurt you. So let them call us what they will.

I still believe that God sits upon a throne. It was self-bestowed sovereignty. I believe in the sovereignty of God.

I believe that God sits upon assembling all events. That's why I can sleep at night. If I thought the events of the world were in the hands of Khrushchev, I could.

And if I thought the events of the world were in the hands even of such good men as Eisenhower, I couldn't sleep, because he's not wise enough to know what to do. God sits on his throne, and he determines all events according to the purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began, deciding all destinies and disposing of all chaste. Now we see here some creatures about which I know very little.

They're seraphims, seraphims as you like. They're the high exalted ones, the fiery burners, and they're only seen once in the scripture. But I note with a good deal of satisfaction that they are seen close to the throne and burning with rapturous love for the Godhead.

Then there was the smoke that filled the temple, and then there was the antiphonal chant, Holy, Holy, Holy Almighty. I have often wondered why the dear old rabbis and the Saints and hymnists of olden times, to the knowledge of the Trinity, just from hearing the seraphim chant, Holy, Holy, Holy. Now I believe, and hear me say this, and when you go out from here if you ever might by accident happen to mention me, remember that I told you that I'm a Trinitarian.

I believe God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the begotten of him before all ages, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not created. And I believe in the Lord and giver of life, who with the Father and Son together is worshiped and glorified.

The older I get and the more I pray the Bible, the more I believe in the Trinity. Here were the seraphim chanting to the Trinity 800 years before Mary the baby wailed in Bethlehem's manger, and the second person of the Trinity came to earth to dwell among us. Now were the words, Holy, Holy, Holy.

And from here on I want to do something that no man ever ought to attempt to do, so I shall make of it, and that is talk a little bit about the Holy, the word Holy here, what the word Holy means. Now it is Lord of the Hosts here, and it is more than an adjective saying that God is a holy God, it's more than that. Static description of glory to the triune God.

And I'm not sure that I know what this means at all, but I will give you four words which I think may come close to it, to a definition. After I have given you this and have talked around here as preachers do, missing the point most of the time, why do what you can with it. Always remember that you can feel your way through to God with your heart.

After your mind has given up and quit, because God lies out yonder, infinitely transcendent, all of his creatures. And the old Germans used to say the heart is always the best theologian. No more with your heart.

Now don't force me to explain what I mean by the heart. I don't know what I mean by the heart. I have a heart, and I know you have a heart, and I know David had a heart, and he talked about it a lot.

And I know that all the churches, even the preachers' hearts have hearts, and we all have hearts. Well, with our heart we may know that at least this much purity. It's good to know there's something left in to think about absolutely pure.

You have to discount the world. A good man is always a good man, but. And a good woman is always a good woman, except.

Saint Abraham, David, all the rest, they had their weaknesses and flaws, and James Stewart, the old saint, said something that. Elijah was a man of like passion. That sounds a little bit like a sort of excuse.

Elijah was a man of like passion, but it's a comforting thing to know that he was a good man and owned of God, hence in which we've described used by God, and yet he was not a perfect man. That's why I feel more comfortable with Edgar than I will with Joseph and, say, Paul, because they were good men. Nothing is written against them.

The other fellows had things wrong with them. If I find some a man that's too good, I'm uncomfortable. I admit I don't find too many, but if I find men too good, it gives you an uncomfortable feeling.

But there is one who's absolutely good, who's absolutely holy, whose moral purity, whose cleanness, who is impeccable, who is faultless, who is perfection itself. That is God. And he gives us a feeling of absolute profaneness in the presence of God.

Now, one thing that's wrong with us is that we don't repent enough. Down in the city of Worthen, Oregon, one of the prelates there said, this was passed on to me, he said it to a Christian brother, a Protestant brother, that he found, and this is not meant to reflect, this was said by this Roman Catholic prelate, he said he believed that when a man repented, he ought to stick. He said, I believe that when anybody repents, they ought to repent and make it stick.

But he said instead of that, they come and confess and go back. And he said, I believe in John the Baptist repentance. I would be glad to hear that coming from there, because I believe in John the Baptist repentance there read in my Bible.

I believe in it, and I'm glad some others believe in it. The reason we don't have more repentance is that we repent for what we do instead of what we are. Always remember that the repentance for what you do may go deep, but that what you are goes deeper.

And it was the sharp contrast between what God was and what Isaiah was, the absolute honest of the deity and the spotted speckled impurities of Isaiah's nature that brought absolute profanity to this man of God. And then there's mystery, and always that baffles and stuns the mind. And we come before God in speechless humility, in the presence of the inexpressible.

I feel that we should always leave room for mystery in our Christian faith. When we do not, we are like rationalists and we can explain everything. Just ask us any question and we're quick on the trigger, we can answer the question.

I don't believe that we can. I think there's mystery runs throughout all the kingdom of God, just as there's mystery running throughout all the kingdom of nature. The most honest scientist will tell you that he knows practically nothing.

And the Christian who has ever seen God on his throne with the eyes of his heart has stopped being an oracle. He won't anymore pretend to know, and he won't also want to condemn another man who might take a little different position from his. Now, I'm not a Roman Catholic, though I respect them for their religion, but I'm a Catholic, that is, I'm a universal Christian.

I love all of what the word means, you know, universal, and I love all of the Lord's people. I just thought as we sat here singing, holy, holy, holy, here's a ream leading a congregation of many denominations in singing an Anglican hymn in an undenied chapel. Now that's what I like, brother, exactly, because that makes you a Christian missionary alliance.

But we got to make room for the mystery that is God, the mystery that can't be so fluent. When I hear a man pray too fluently, I know he isn't seeing anything, because his ability to express himself in prayer, unless it should be by a sudden passion without pouring of the Holy Ghost upon him, would enable it. But just average, when we're praying too fluently, we're not seeing much.

Well, then there was strangeness. Somebody said, like nothing we know, remote and unknown, what we've tried to do in our terrible day is to trim ties and to get control of God and sink him down where we can use him as we wish, and we've even made him somebody up there who likes us. One woman said, crawling around among the pubs, that is, the saloons in New York, nightclubs, and she sat down and began to talk to people, and somebody talked about God, and she said, by the way, do you know God? And he said, no, he didn't think he did.

Well, she said, you ought to know God, just a living doll. And ever since I've heard that, I've had a pain inside of my heart, that human beings, people brought up in a Christian society, so-called, could refer to the ineffably holy, triune God-doll. Another man said God was a good fellow, and all these people claim to be Christians.

My brother, there's something that's different, it's beyond, it's above us, it's transcendent. We can't get through. We have to throw our hearts open and say, God, shine my understanding, for I'll never find the otherwise.

And when we've seen God on the throne, we've had the foreseeing, something portentous and dreadful and terrifying here. You know, there's a passage in the book of Isaiah, written later on, where it says, ask the question, who among us shall dwell with eternal fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burning? Preach on hell and ask which one in the congregation is going to go to hell? Well, you couldn't miss it any further, you know, if you try. The fact is, that's not hell for the, it answers its own question.

Who shall dwell with the everlasting burning? It says, he that hath clean hands, and hath lifted up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully, he shall see the king in his beauty, in a land that is far off. The everlasting fire, the eternal burning, our God is a consuming fire, and it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And in the book of this chapter, you'll remember that Ezekiel, by the river Tebar, despondent and down, dejected, God opened heavens, and God then saw the open heaven, and then coming out of the fire, he saw four-faced creatures out of the fire.

We Christians should be men and women out of the fire. Now, we should be perfectly normal, perfectly sound, perfectly, say, with a sense of humor. We should be perfectly down-to-earth and practical as James.

But on the other hand, we should have the top side of our soul open. We should have the top side, the windows above, open to the mystery that is God. And a Christian should be a walking mystery, a walking miracle.

A Christian never should be the kind of man that can be explained. You've all read William James, *Variety*, and he tried to explain it there. For a great many years in my earlier life, I read psychology constantly, and I got acquainted with all of it, even some that I couldn't understand.

And when they're all right along, they talk about your head, but about Christianity, they all begin to flounder, because they're trying to explain in psychological terms that which is not psychological. And a Christian should have upon him an element that is beyond psychology, beyond the laws, up into the spiritual laws. Drummond wrote his great book, *Natural Laws and the Spiritual World*, and showed how natural laws could be projected and seen to be the laws that govern the kingdom of God.

And he made a pretty good job of it, defending his thesis, I think, and I've gotten some help from that. We'll find, I think, if we read our Bible and pray, that there is that in the kingdom of God which is potentially fearful, which is dreadful to a point where we cannot be so flippant about it. Now, God is holy.

He's actively hostile to sin. He must be. And God can only burn on and burn on and burn forever.

Never let any spiritual experience or any interpretation of scripture, never let anybody sin your hatred for sin. Even if you fall flat into it, hate it with holy hatred and get out of it fast. Sin that brought the downfall of the race, it was sin that brought the Savior to die on a Roman cross.

It is sin that has filled every jail and every insane asylum. It is sin that has made every murder and every divorce and every crime that's been committed since the world began. Sin it all is.

And in the presence of this awful, holy God, sin can never be anything but a heinous, heinous deformity. Well, the man of God said, the fulness of the earth is full of his glory. You see, Isaiah wasn't having a vision here.

Isaiah was seeing something. It was there. There's a difference between imagining something to be there and seeing what is there.

William Blake is the poet I happen to like. Tiger, tiger, burning bright. You can rattle on for a week about Blake.

He's very good. But there was a screw that vibrated a little bit somewhere, somewhere. I wouldn't say it was loose, but it vibrated.

And he believed in fairies, you know. And you'd go in, you'd see him sitting there to somebody, and they'd say, who are you talking to? William, he'd say, a fairy, talking to a fairy on his knee. Well, and there was a little fairy there.

Now, it's one thing to imagine something is there. It's another thing to have the ability to see what is there. And that's what Isaiah saw.

He saw God. He saw God until he saw God. And you know that if we had our eyes open, we'd see God.

God is everywhere. God keeps their wanted places. Turn but a stone and start a wing.

It's you. It's your alienated faces that miss the many splendors. It is our faces that have been turned away from God.

But now Isaiah sees this God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Isaiah cried, I am undone. Here was what somebody called self-depreciation to the form of total dis-value.

You know what I'm afraid of? Now, you won't mind my saying this, will you? Because it wouldn't do any good. Because, you know, I'll get out of here tomorrow. But the thing that I'm afraid that you're going to try to go out and, uh, and, uh, convert the meats and methods.

I'm afraid unconsciously that you're going out saying, I can do it. No, my brother, you can't do it. And there aren't notions of learning in the world.

If you could go through them all and learn everything that can be learned and read and written, there still isn't enough knowledge in the world to enable you to do the job the Holy Ghost is sending you out to do. Use your, your instruments. He'll use your skills and your gifts.

I believe in that. All right. He'll prove them, but he'll never, you never can do it by yourself.

You've got to be undone. The man God uses is the none. The man who sees God sitting upon a throne and the result is he's undone.

Here was an astonished man, and his whole world suddenly dissolved into a vast eternal whiteness. And he was against it, red and black. And he, he said, man, I have seen the King.

What kind of a man was Isaiah anyhow? Was he a murderer, a liar, a drunkard? No, it wasn't any of those things. He was a fine, young, cultured fellow, cousin to the King, a poet in his own right. Why Isaiah was a man, he could have been elected to any mission board.

He could have been elected to any church. He was a good man, this Isaiah. And I wish I, by nature, wasn't half as good.

But after all, man, over against the internal whiteness. What is the purest morality over against the holiness of the unspeakably holy God? Isaiah, when he cried out, I am undone, he was meaning there that he was experiencing the undone-ness set over against the holiness of the Creator. And what we hear in these words, I am undone, is the pain cry of uncleanness.

It's the pain cry. That's why I don't like the kind of evangelism that gets people. I believe that there ought to be a pain cry.

I think that there ought to be a birth from within. I feel that there should be a terror of seeing ourselves in violent contrast to the holy, holy, holy God. And unless we go deep, our repentance will never go.

And if our repentance doesn't go deep, our Christian experience will not go deep. But here was the man who was crying out for what he had done, for he didn't mention a single sin. David named a sin or two.

He didn't name one, for it was what was terrifying him here. It was what he was himself, what he was. He was a human being, and as a fallen human being, as such, he knew that he would never dare enter the presence of this awesome God.

So he cried out for what he had undone. Now, my friends, it isn't a question today whether we have Isaiah's uncleanness or not, but it's a question of whether we have his uncleanness. He was unclean, and thank God became aware of it.

But the world today is unclean, but unaware of it. But uncleanness without awareness has terrible consequences, and that's what's wrong with the world, and that's what's wrong with the Church, and that's what's wrong with Protestantism. We are unclean without being aware.

Uncleanness without awareness makes us very bold and very self-assured, and gives us a notion of our own holiness, and creates false assurance, and keeps the door shut to hope. But when we see God on the throne in the eyes of our hearts, and by means of the theology that our Bible gives us, we mount by faith and by inward illumination to behold a little of how holy God is. After that, there will never be depravity.

I've always believed in depravity, and Calvin didn't invent that. People think that he didn't. David talked about that long before Calvin was ever heard of.

The first baby that was born, the first one, he was born depraved. And the work of the Holy Ghost is to make us know that we're depraved. But you say, of course they're depraved, harlots and publicans.

But you know, friends, that isn't our problem. Our problem is the depravity in the circle of the just among the saints, among those who claim to be great souls, and whose pictures get in the papers, and who have things named after them. I've often wondered about the churches, the Jones Memorial and the Smith Memorial.

I wonder if the people who named the church knew what that old boy had in his heart, whether they'd have done it. You know, it's just a thought. It's not a serious part of the sermon, but it's just a side thought, that if we knew that lies in the human breast, well, when you cry it out, I'm undone.

God said to the seraph, go, and the seraph came and put the coal on his lips. Now, that's a very poetic thing. If I were an artist, I hope my artist friend Chase is in the audience, I don't know, he said he was an artist, and if I were an artist, I would paint a picture, I think, of this.

I would never paint a picture of God or Christ, but maybe of this. Do you know, poetic and too artistic, the way we've got it figured out. Did you ever stop to think that a live coal meant a burning, and a burning coal applied to a human lip? You think there's anything poetic about that? Anything to write to? No, that, that was painful.

Imagine that live coal touching that lip, and a scream of pain, and a puff going up. Afterwards, burning flesh was smelled throughout all the building. This man had to be, had to be purified.

The salvation army says, blood and fire, and I'm for it. Purification by blood and fire. In this case, it was fire.

And this man was purified. Symbolic of all his nature, we're purified by fire. Now, said God, thine iniquity is taken away.

What is called a sense of restored moral innocence. Isaiah knew he was bad, but now he had a sense of moral innocence. All the wonder of the grace of God, that we can know how bad we are at the same time,

after we have gone through this humiliating experience, this devastating experience.

After we've gone through it, and the coal of fire touched our lips, passed our deep iniquity, and acknowledged how bad we are. Not our sins committed, but our sin uncommitted, and the grace touches us. Then we have that sense of restored moral innocence.

The forgiving love of God can restore us. We can serve him. Then, God said, he hadn't said it before, there was no use to say it before.

But as soon as Isaiah had confessed, then God said, who shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said Isaiah, here am I, send me. There was the man whose iniquity was taken away. Let's never take anything for granted, brothers and sisters.

Never take anything for granted. Do you know the one that I pray the most for in my pastoral work? Do you know who gives me the most trouble? Do you know the one that is worst of all? Just myself. And I'm not saying it to be humble, that's real and true.

Trouble with myself. I've preached all my lifetime to people that are better than I am. I've preached to people that I'm sure never had a past equal to mine, and that I'm sure know God many of them just as well or better.

After this place of purity that Isaiah did, then God says, I'll use you. And so he sent out Isaiah. Finish.

But I want to close. You know they say that you're supposed to close with a hymn. I never do, or rarely do, but I thought this morning I'd be orthodox for a change.

A man wrote a hymn. Nobody ever sings it. We don't sing the other ones.

And a man wrote this. And when he wrote it, he must have been on these knees. This was never composed in a plastic top desk and a telephone and a dictating machine.

No man could write this like that. He didn't use a ballpoint pen. He probably used a quill and sweated and hung through.

I'll read it and close. Eternal light, eternal light, how pure the soul must be when placed within thy searching sight. It shrinks not, but with come live and look on thee.

The spirits that surround thy throne may bear the burning bliss, but that is surely theirs alone, since for none a fallen world like this. Yet how shall I, whose native sphere is dark, whom before the ineffable appear, and on my naked spirit bear that uncreated being? There to rise to that sublime abode, and offering unto sacrifice the Holy Spirit's energies. These, these prepare us for the sight of holiness above.

The suns of ignorance and night may dwell with the eternal light through the eternal love. Wonderful. May God's vision of himself that will disvalue us to the point of valuation.

From there he can raise us up and send us out and say, go this way.

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