

Holiness of God

by Charles Price

The holiness of God is a profound and life-changing experience that requires removing obstacles, renewing our awareness of God, and seeking to know him more deeply.

Duration: 55:41

Topics: "Holiness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of knowing God in order to understand sin. They explain that sin is falling short of the character and glory of God. The speaker uses the example of a commercial where two shirts are washed with different detergents to illustrate the difference between ordinary washing powder and a special one. The sermon also references the biblical story of Isaiah encountering the holiness of God and being cleansed of his sin. The speaker concludes by highlighting the need for humility and self-reflection, rather than judgment of others, as Jesus came to save the world, not condemn it.

Transcript

I'm going to read the first six verses, though keep your Bible open, and we'll look at the rest of this chapter as well, which is not a very long chapter. But Isaiah chapter six and verse one. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on the throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

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. And they were calling to one another, holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.

The whole earth is full of his glory. The sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. Woe to me, I cried, I am ruined from a man of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.

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. That's as far as I'll read just for now.

Some weeks ago, I began a series on knowing God, and some of you have been here for many of those, because this is what the Christian life actually is, it's not just what it's about, it's what it is, it is knowing God. Jesus defined eternal life in John 17 in verse three. This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Paul stated his ambition was that I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection. Knowing Christ, knowing God. His prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1 verse 17, was they keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation that you may know him better.

That is what spiritual growth is going to involve in your life, that you know God better than you did before. Now, we talked about the existence of God, we looked at some of the philosophical arguments for his existence. How do you know if God exists from a closed Bible, so to speak? We talked about the knowability of God, how we may even dare to assume we might know God, who is so altogether different and bigger than we are.

We talked about the experience of God, the fact that God reveals his names in particular in scripture through people's experience of himself. We talked about the sovereignty of God, and today I want to talk to you about the holiness of God. The word holy means to be separate, to be apart, to be distinct.

In the Bible it's often used of something that has been separated from common use to divine use, for instance, the holy utensils in the tabernacle, and later the temple, they're described as holy, they're set apart from normal mundane usage for specific divine usage. That's the meaning of the word holy, to be set apart. The holiness of God is spoken of primarily in two ways in scripture.

First, regarding his uniqueness, that as a creator, he is set apart and different from all of his creation. As Hannah prayed in 1 Samuel 2 and verse 2, there is no one holy like the Lord. He is completely and totally and utterly unique.

The second way in which this is spoken of in scripture is when it speaks of what I can describe as ethical qualities that are described as being holy. That is his goodness, his cleanliness, his rightness, his dazzling purity, as referred to in various ways. But I felt tonight in preparing for this and thinking and praying about this, that I want to talk to you about experiencing the holiness of God.

I find in scripture that when there are encounters with God and his holiness, such as here in Isaiah 6, it's not that Isaiah had a revelation of God's holiness so much as he had an experience of God's holiness. It did something to Isaiah. And the holiness of God is not just a theory or a set of attributes or expressed in some things he does.

The holiness of God is something you and I need to encounter and I ask myself as I prepare this and share this with you tonight, to what extent have I encountered and experienced God and his holiness? Isaiah had an experience of the holiness of God here in Isaiah chapter 6. And I think the best way to share this whole theme with you is simply to give an exposition of this chapter, this experience. There are three things I want to point out to you in Isaiah 6, which will help us, I think, see how we may experience God's holiness in the way that Isaiah did here. And the first thing I want to talk about is that there was an obstacle that had to be removed.

Before Isaiah could ever experience God's holiness, an obstacle had to be removed. What do I mean by that? Let me read you again verse one. 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.

Now, when you first read that statement, in the year that King Uzziah died, it may simply appear as being a means of dating the event. They didn't have calendars as we do and they dated events by bigger, better known events that took place. Uzziah rather died around 740 BC.

We can trace that fairly easily. But I want to suggest there's something more to it than this. In Isaiah chapter one and verse one, the opening verse of the book, Isaiah dates his ministry.

Let me read you Isaiah one, verse one. The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Now, you don't have to be very smart to go back to the book of 2 Chronicles.

You can look at those reigns and work out how long those folks were on the throne. But it's during the reign of Uzziah that Isaiah began his ministry. And there are five chapters that take place before he gets to this place in chapter six when he says, in the year that King Uzziah died, and maybe he was already ministering for several years through the latter part of Uzziah's reign, but when Uzziah died, something happened that was not simply a coincidence I want to point out to you and suggest to you.

It was because Uzziah died, an obstacle was removed. Isaiah saw the Lord. You see, let me tell you a bit about Uzziah because this is interesting and important.

Just turn to 2 Chronicles chapter 26 if you have your Bible with you. 2 Chronicles chapter 26. And let me just read you from verse three to verse five, just three verses that describe Uzziah.

It says that Uzziah was 16 years old when he became king and he reigned in Jerusalem 52 years. His mother's name was Jechaliah. She was from Jerusalem.

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord just as his father Amaziah had done. By the way, you'll find the kings of Israel and Judah are divided into two categories. Those who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, those who did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

That's how they're categorized. Well, Uzziah was one of those who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Verse five says, he sought God during the days of Zechariah who instructed him in the fear of God.

And as long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. And Uzziah is introduced as a man who is hungry for God, who is seeking after God, who's been instructed. And Uzziah has arranged this instruction by a man called Zechariah in the things of God.

And as he sought the Lord, God gave him success. Let me read verse six. He went to war against the Philistines and broke down the walls of Gath, Jabnah and Ashdod.

Those were all Philistine cities. He then rebuilt towns near Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabs who lived in Gerbale and against the Mayonites.

The Ammonites brought tribute to Uzziah and his fame spread as far as the border of Egypt because he had become very powerful. The following verses, if you have time to read them, you can read them later.

You can see some of his military exploits.

He trained an army of over 300,000 men. He supplied them with shields and spears and helmets and coats of armor and bows and sling stones. The whole army had these weapons at their disposal.

He built machines, it tells us, for shooting large arrows and also machines to hurl large stones. You know, these big, presumably some kind of leverage and they would shoot these big stones. And Uzziah was involved in inventing some of these weapons.

He saw victory against the Philistines who were their most common enemy, against the Arabs, against the Ammonites. And his fame spread, it says, down to the border of Egypt. Egypt was the superpower at this time.

He became very powerful. Domestically, he built great cities. He dug cisterns.

He bred livestock. He planted vineyards. It says he loved the soil.

The summary there of Uzziah's reign is that he was extremely successful. He was a hero in Israel. And Isaiah grew up in the midst of this during this peak period when Uzziah was king.

There was a man of God at the helm of the nation. And Isaiah would have known that. It was God who was giving him success.

He was the role model for the youth of the nation. Very likely, he was a hero to Isaiah himself. But then something went sadly wrong.

Let me read you verse 15. I'll read you the last part of verse 15. His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful.

But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God. He entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense, something only a priest was permitted to do.

And a courageous priest went in and challenged Uzziah. I'm telling you the story now. Challenged him.

And God struck him with leprosy. And for the last few years of his life, Uzziah was confined to a house by himself, where he was in isolation with leprosy. And his son, Jotham, instead occupied the throne until he died or governed the nation.

Now Uzziah had been successful probably for 45 years or so. It doesn't give us the exact time of this. It doesn't tell us when he became proud.

But it seems to me it was towards the end of the 52 years he was on the throne, because it says his son Jotham governed the nation while Uzziah, with his leprosy, had to go into isolation. And when he eventually died, his son Jotham became king, and he was only 25 when he became king. So I would think he was not more than seven years at the most when his father had leprosy, which means that probably 45 years or so, Uzziah reigned as a good, godly king, led the nation in a way that was godly, and people saw that God was at work there.

And then these last years, he became proud, and God judged him. And I want to suggest two possible scenarios as far as Isaiah was concerned in his relationship to Uzziah and why it was when Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the Lord. The first possibility is that Isaiah was mesmerized by Uzziah, that Uzziah was something of a hero to him.

He'd grown up in a nation which, by and large, was godless, but with a king who was godly. That makes any young man like Isaiah likely to see him as a hero. He was a spiritual leader.

He was a man who had listened to God. He was a man who had modeled godliness. And Isaiah may not have known the cause of his leprosy.

He would have known that, as a leper, he was in isolation for these last few years. He may not have known. It's because God had judged him because of his pride.

But I suggest to you the possibility that because of the status that Uzziah held, that maybe Isaiah's dealings with God were secondhand at this stage. He looked to Uzziah as the man of God in the nation. And it happens very easily that we look to other people as being almost our intermediary between ourselves and God.

We want them to do business with God and we take things from them, but we don't do business with God ourselves. You know, there's some wives who look to their husbands as their, quote, spiritual leader. They don't do business with God themselves.

They do so through their husbands. There's some husbands whose wives are the more spiritual and they deal with God through their wife. There's some people whose dealings with God is through their pastor or through their church or through somebody they recognize to be godly.

And it's very easy to do. It's very easy to do. It's very easy to assume that other people have an access to God that is denied to us in some way.

Now on Sundays when I stand at the front, people come to me and very often ask me to pray for them. I'm very, very happy to do that. But I always say to them, as long as you don't think that my prayers are more effective than yours, as long as you don't think in coming to ask me to pray for you, somehow that adds some weight to the prayer that is not there when you pray.

Because some people do think that. They do believe there are other people who somehow, if they can get them involved in praying for them, it'll be more effective than their own prayers. Their relationship with God has become second hand.

It's become one step removed. I often hear TV preachers, not that I listen to them very much, but I often hear TV preachers invite people to write in and we will pray for you. I saw one guy who had all these big massive prayer requests that had come in and his praying for them was putting his hand on this big pile.

But whether they meant it or not, they were conveying the impression that my prayers are going to be effective more than yours are going to be. It was encouraging, as I would see it, spiritual immaturity instead of encouraging people to go directly to God themselves. And it may be, you see that Isaiah had seen Uzziah in this position as a man of God and he'd look to him rather than directly to God himself.

I wonder if you know God for yourself, by the way, because sometimes we don't go to him ourselves. We don't deal with God ourselves. We don't talk to God ourselves very much.

We don't listen to God ourselves very much. We don't spend time in the word of God ourselves with expectancy and confidence that God can speak to me through this. To get our spiritual nourishment, we go to somebody else who we hope has spent time listening to God and that they will feed us.

Now we do feed one another, of course, that's part of God's purpose. But until we recognize that we have direct access to God and we can have expectancy of God working in my life and speaking to me and teaching me, we're always going to have a one-step removed relationship. Maybe Isaiah was like that.

Maybe he was mesmerized by Uzziah. The other possibility is that Isaiah was not mesmerized by Uzziah, but disillusioned by Uzziah because maybe in fact Isaiah did know about Uzziah's downfall. Maybe he did know that he had gone into the temple, taken the place that belonged exclusively to the priest and he had sinned against God in so doing and God had judged him and he'd got this leprosy and maybe Isaiah had become disillusioned.

He'd become disappointed at this behavior of a man of God. Maybe he'd been hurt by this. Maybe his confidence had been shaken because he'd trusted Uzziah.

Now his confidence has been shaken. But whatever, if that was the case, it has blocked his own vision of God. And this happens to people too.

I meet people who stop going to church sometimes because of the behavior of somebody, especially somebody they trusted. Maybe a pastor, maybe somebody else. And they've become upset by it.

They've become hurt by it. They've become disappointed. And so they go away from God because their access to God was based on this person or these people or this church.

I talk to people in that situation who will tell me how it happened that they stopped going to a place of worship. They stopped going to a church because of what somebody had done. And the sad thing is that very often it's because they haven't really known God, they've just known church.

There's a phrase, by the way, a word I thoroughly dislike. It's a popular word these days. It's the word unchurched.

We talk with people who are unchurched, you know, as though it's a disease or something. Do you know the bigger problem I find is people who've been church-ed and they don't relate to God, they relate to the church. They don't relate to God, they relate to the pastor or they relate to the Bible class leader or they relate to whoever it is that they look to in that situation.

And then something goes wrong and they get hurt and they quit. Now I'm speculating that Isaiah was either mesmerized by Uzziah or was disillusioned by Uzziah. But I suggest one of them was the case.

Because in the year that King Uzziah died, it doesn't just say, I saw the Lord. He says, I saw the Lord seated on a throne. Where did Uzziah sit? He was the king.

He sat on the throne. And sometimes we have to become weaned from those on whom we rely instead of God and it's so easy to do that before we're ever going to have a real encounter with God himself. Uzziah had sat on the throne for 52 years.

And when the throne was suddenly vacated and the one to whom Isaiah had looked was gone. Then I saw the Lord. You know, sometimes God allows things in our lives that do knock down the pedestals that we may have put people on or knock down the structures that we have been trusting because when they are knocked down, then we see the Lord as Isaiah did.

But that was the first thing I want to point out to you in his encounter with God, his experience of the wholeness of God. First of all, it was an obstacle that had to be removed. Secondly, there is what I'm going to call an awareness that had to be renewed.

An awareness that had to be renewed. And it was awareness of two things. It was an awareness first of God himself.

Now Isaiah, of course, knew God. He was already a prophet. But now there's a renewed awareness of God that is different, that is brilliant in its glory, which he had not had before.

And secondly, as we'll see in a moment, there's a renewed awareness of himself as well. Now, there's a renewed awareness of God. He'd already encountered God.

God had already revealed things to him. He was already preaching them. But now Isaiah saw the Lord in a way that he'd never seen him before.

Now, it's interesting. He says, I saw the Lord, and then the Lord himself is not described in any way because he, of course, is beyond any description. But those things which surrounded him, the symbols that surrounded him are described.

He says, for instance, he was seated on a throne. That is a symbol of authority and power. It says that he was high and exalted.

That again, a symbol of his supremacy and his sovereignty. It says there were seraphs who were above him. But although they were above him, they were in a position of servants attending to him.

And all these are images of his uniqueness and his sovereignty and his greatness. The seraphs, by the way, or if you have a King James Bible, the seraphim, I think the best way to describe them is they are a species of angel. There are several different kinds of angels, it seems.

Cherubim is one, seraphim, seraphs here, cherubim in the Garden of Eden, and angels and archangels. These seraphim have wings. In fact, they have six wings each, it says.

With two of them, they covered their faces. With two of them, they covered their feet. With two, they flew.

And as they were flying, they were calling out to one another, holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory. And their ministry is first and foremost the ministry of proclaiming the holiness of God.

And having proclaimed the holiness of God, as we'll see in a moment, he was also administering the holiness of God because they came to Isaiah and they ministered holiness and cleanliness to Isaiah. In just a moment, we'll see that. And it says in verse four, at the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

This is imagery of confusion and probably fear and uncertainty. When Isaiah is probably saying, what in the world is happening? The doorposts are shaking, the thresholds are shaking, there's smoke filling the place. I think that's significant because the holiness of God fits no earthly paradigm.

There is nothing with which we can compare the holiness of God. There's nothing with which we can contrast the holiness of God. We cannot put him into a box and say, that is what it means for God to be holy.

Isaiah's experience of God's holiness was one that he could not put into some neat explanation. It is an image of confusion and uncertainty. Isaiah wrote later about God and he said twice, I'll read you the two occasions, Isaiah 40, verse 18.

He said, to whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? Now writing from his own experience there, Isaiah says, what can you compare God with? I had an encounter with God and there was no words to describe it, only an experience of it. And it was an experience of uncertainty and confusion at first. In Isaiah 46, verse five, he says again, to whom will you compare me? Or God speaks now, to whom will you compare me? Or can be equal to whom will you liken me? That we may be compared.

There is no analogy of God with which you can compare him or contrast him. But as Isaiah experiences this revelation of God and his holiness and the affirmation of his holiness by these seraphs, his whole world view is about to be revolutionized, as we'll see if we were to go through it in detail, which we won't be able to tonight. But his view of God is revolutionized, first of all.

His view of himself is revolutionized. His view of his work, which he was already involved in, is revolutionized. His view of the world, of which he's a part, was revolutionized.

Now, these are mammoth issues. God, me, my work, my world, these are mammoth issues in our lives, but they become transformed and revolutionized when we meet with God as he did. I would suggest we've not really met with God if we still think the same way afterwards as we did before.

We've not really encountered God if our minds are not being molded and changed. That's why we're transformed by the renewing of our minds. When you meet with God, our minds are molded and changed.

But for Isaiah himself, not only was there a new awareness of God, a renewed awareness of God, but there's a renewed awareness of himself, because he cries out in verse five. Let me read it to you. Woe is me, I cried.

I am ruined, for I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty. To see God is always then to see ourselves in a new light. And you know something? When you see God and then you see yourself, it's not a pretty sight.

When we see God in his holiness, we see ourselves in our unholiness, as Isaiah did here. Woe is me. You know, we can't understand sin simply in the light of sin itself.

By that I mean, if we say, well, here's a list of things we call sin, they won't make much impact on us. We only understand sin in the light of God, because sin, the word sin, means to miss the mark. If you use an archery, take an arrow, shoot at a target, and you miss the target, it was called sin.

That means you only know what sin is if there is a target. You know, if somebody went out with a bow and arrow and just pulled it back and they just shot the arrow for the fun of shooting the arrow and there was no target, you couldn't go out to them and say that was a good shot or a bad shot. There's no means of measuring the kind of shot it is.

If you stick up a target and say, okay, now hit the shot and you pull back, hit the target, you pull back the arrow and you fire the arrow, now you can say it's a good shot or a bad shot, because there's a target. What is the target that sin is measured against? What is sin coming short of, in other words? And many of you know the verse in Romans 3, 23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. What is the glory of God? The glory of God is the moral purity of God, is the moral character of God.

And these seraphs cry, holy, holy, holy is the Lord almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory. And Isaiah says, woe is me.

Because as he sees the glory of God and the beauty and purity of God, he sees his come short. That's why talking to people about sin isn't going to help them understand their sin. So only as there's a revelation of God to them.

You can say to somebody, something is a sin, they say, well, that's your opinion. I don't think it is. I'm happy about this.

And it becomes your opinion against theirs. You only know what sin is when you know who God is. And that sin is coming short of the glory, the character of God.

And that's why our task as we seek to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, is that people might know and see God. And then when they see God, they will see themselves. I remember a commercial on television years ago in England where a man came onto the screen wearing a shirt that had been washed in ordinary washing powder.

It was a white shirt washed in ordinary washing powder. When he came on the screen with a smile on his face, he looked at the screen and thought, yeah, that's a white shirt. Then a guy came onto the screen with a shirt washed in, I don't know, fairy liquid or whatever it was, some special washing powder.

Is it not fairy liquid? What is it? I don't know, whatever. Is that washing up liquid? Whatever. Fairy delight, whatever washing powders are called.

And when the guy with the shirt washed in fairy delight came and stood next to the guy with the shirt washed in ordinary washing powder, you thought to yourself, he's got a gray shirt on. And his face began to sink. You see, if you met that guy on the street with a shirt washed in ordinary washing powder, a nice white shirt, said, excuse me, I've got a dirty shirt on, it's gray.

He'd say, what do you mean, got a gray shirt on? This has just been washed in ordinary washing powder. It's perfectly clean. When you put him alongside the man with the shirt washed in the fairy delight, whatever it's called, he said to himself, I got a dirty shirt on.

You can waste your time telling people, this is sin, this is sin, this is sin, that is sin, you are a sinner. You can waste your time telling people that. They'll simply write you off as being judgmental and arrogant.

But when they see God, and one of the marks that you know that they have seen God, that Christ has been revealed to their hearts and their souls, is they begin to say what Isaiah said, woe is me, I'm dirty. We never encounter God in his beauty and glory and holiness without at the same time becoming aware of our own unholiness. It's what Job wrote at the end of his book.

Let me read you Job 42 and verse five. He said, my ears had heard of you, he's speaking to God, my ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you, therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. My eyes have seen you.

How do you know he's actually seen God? Because of what happens next, I repent in dust and ashes. The bankrupt condition of our own hearts will be a revelation to our souls that comes as we meet with God and his beauty. And we live without awareness.

If you were here this morning, you know we talked about that a little bit also. I want to point something else important out here. Isaiah had been preaching about sin before Isaiah chapter six.

In Isaiah chapter five, let me read you some things that he said. Isaiah chapter five and verse eight. He says, woe to you who had house to house and joined field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.

That's verse eight. Verse 11, woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they're inflamed with wine. Down in verse 18, woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit and wickedness as with cart ropes.

Verse 20, woe to those who call evil good and good evil and put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Verse 21, woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. Verse 22, woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, et cetera.

Interesting, this is Isaiah preaching in chapter five. Woe to you, woe to you, woe to those, woe to those, woe to them. You notice the tone of his preaching? Then in chapter six, he meets with God.

You know what happens? His message changes. He says, woe to me. You know, the woe to them message is usually a message of those who have their doctrines right, their ethical values right, but they may not have yet seen God because when you see God, your message becomes woe to me.

You know, personally, let me be honest with you, I'm tired of the woe to them message. It sounds from pulpits and from the media of evangelicalism. I get emails and letters quite often from people and maybe some of you have written to me about this.

You'd like to hear a bit more condemnation of our society from this pulpit. You'd like to hear a little more exposure of the ungodly movements in our nation. And there is a place for speaking to the godlessness of our society.

There is a place for that. But we don't have a right to preach the woe to them message until we are living in the woe to me message. And that's what I'm waiting for before we can start addressing the nation.

That we as men and women who know Christ get off our high horses and say woe to me. As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4, 17, it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. Tragically, we have lost any moral

right to address the morality of our nation because of the immorality of our churches.

When many folks meet Sunday by Sunday, living together outside of marriage, the divorce rate is high as in the world at large. I know there are reasons why marriages break up. I know that.

I'm just saying, we ought to know some resources that we don't seem to be knowing if we know God. It can be very easy and very cheap to stand up and say woe to them. Look at that water there, woe to them.

But until we as a people of God are on our faces before God saying woe to me, because you'll actually discover that once, as I had said that, God then told him to go and speak to the nation later in this chapter. You know what Jesus said in John 12, 47? I did not come to judge the world. I came to save the world.

John 3, 17, God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world. And sometimes we'd love to judge it, we'd love to condemn it. Our ministry is to bring salvation to it.

But when we develop a ministry of condemning the world, it's actually the Pharisaic ministry of the New Testament. But I'm intrigued that Isaiah preached that very easily until he came into the temple. Isaiah had died, I saw the Lord, and his message becomes woe to me.

I am a man of unclean lips. But it doesn't stop there, of course. When God exposes our failure and our sin, as I said this morning, it is never to humiliate us, it is never to condemn us, it is always to liberate us.

And verse six, it says, then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar, and with it he touched my mouth and said, see, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for. There's nothing so marvelous as knowing that you're cleansed, especially when you know you don't deserve it. But you're no cleansing.

I mean, Isaiah was not only a believer in God, he was a prophet already, it would seem. There's some debate about the timing of Isaiah chapter six and the sequence of Isaiah's life, but it seems to me that he was already ministering. But now that he's met with God and he's seen his sin, woe is me, your guilt is taken away, your sin is atoned for.

The seraphs who minister the holiness of God then minister the cleansing to Isaiah. I find it interesting that Isaiah's sin seems to have had a lot to do with his mouth. Have you noticed that there in the words? He says in verse five, I'm a man of unclean lips.

Verse six, he touched my mouth and said, see this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away, your sin is atoned for. We can only speculate. What was it about Isaiah's lips and his mouth that he was needing to be forgiven of? I wonder if it was his woe to them message.

I wonder if it was getting onto a high horse and saying, woe to them, you out there, down there. And God said, woe to me. Lord, cleanse my lips.

But what I find interesting and what I find is a pattern in God's gracious dealings with us is that the very area of his sin, his lips became the very area of his ministry. Because he was then told to go and speak. This is called redemption.

The word redemption is to redeem, is to buy back something that is gone. Isaiah says, Lord, I'm a man of unclean lips. My mouth is dirty.

God doesn't come and say, all right, let me cleanse you, but now keep your mouth shut for the rest of your life. No, he cleanses and then he commissions from that very area of his failure. You know, Paul writes about being comforted with the comfort with which we will comfort others.

Sometimes the area in which you and I can be most effective in our own lives is the area of our biggest failures and sin. Because that's where we have experienced and known the grace of God. Met a man here this morning who's just had an encounter with God.

He shouldn't have been in church this morning. He's on parole and he broke his parole to come to church this morning. He's been a drug addict for many years.

He's been in and out of prison for many years. But he came to talk to me and I passed him to somebody else after a while because he had a lot to talk about. He had a line of people.

But somebody who I know has helped him and will continue to help him. But he's seen God and there was a radiance on his face, an enthusiasm on his face. You see, when you meet a holy God, we don't cower.

We recognize, woe is me, but then we know his cleansing because his holiness is not just something he keeps to himself, he imparts it to us. Marvelously, Isaiah wrote again in Isaiah 57 verse 15. This is what the high and the lofty one says.

He who lives forever, whose name is holy. Isn't this, this is him speaking now about God, who says, I live in a high and a holy place, but I also live with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite. Isn't that an amazing verse? Isaiah 57 verse 15.

I live in a high and holy place. That's where I've got two homes. There's God, I've got two addresses.

One is the high and holy place, but I also live with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit. I make my holy habitation, the heart of the contrite and the lowly person. And that's where he displays his holiness.

But why does God reveal his holiness to us? Why does he cleanse us? To enable him to ask us a question we will never hear until this point, it's the question in verse eight. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send and who will go for us? And I said, here am I, send me. I said there are three points and my third one will be very brief.

Firstly, there's an obstacle that had to be removed. Isaiah, when he died, I saw the Lord. An awareness that had to be renewed, an awareness of God, an awareness of himself.

And now there's a direction that has to be reviewed. Where are you going with your life, Isaiah? Because when I know the cleansing of God, I hear the voice. The voice says, who will go for me? Notice he doesn't frog march in and say, all right, Isaiah, now you're cleansed, off you go.

I'm gonna push you in a direction now that I want you to go. No, he invites in, who will go for me? And the answer comes back, here am I, send me. And you know how much we have seen God and seen him in his holiness by how we respond to the question, who will go for me? If we've not really encountered God ourselves in a deep way, we'll say, well, I hope some people go for you, God.

I hope there'll be people around who will take an opportunity. But I'm preoccupied, I'm busy. No, it's here am I. And actually, when Isaiah said that, here am I, send me, God sent him to a ministry of failure, interestingly, because let me read verse nine.

He said, go and tell this people, be ever hearing, but never understanding, be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused, make their ears dull, and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

Then I said, for how long, O Lord? And he answered, until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitants, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. Wow. This is the oddest commission ever given to a prophet in the whole of scripture.

Who will go for me? Here am I, send me. Go, but don't expect any results. Because as you go, they'll hear, they won't understand, they'll see, they won't perceive, their hearts are calloused, their minds are dull, their eyes are closed.

Well, how long, Lord? Is this, you talking about six months here? No, until the cities lie ruined, without inhabitants, until everything is deserted. This is a remarkable, remarkably depressing commission. You know, anyone can fulfill a ministry that is successful.

Anybody can fulfill a ministry that's successful. It takes courage and godliness to fulfill a ministry that no one ever sees the fruit of. Now, there was going to be fruit, because there's no such thing as a life of failure.

There's no such thing as a ministry of failure, even though I've described it that way. But in Isaiah's own lifetime, in Isaiah's own experience, he wouldn't see it. He spoke about it, the last 27 chapters of his book are projected to appear much later, when God now is reigning once again amongst his people.

He saw it, prophetically. But he said in verse 13, let me read this, the last verse of the chapter. Though a tent remain, they're going to be sent away.

This is the Babylonian exile into which they will all go. And although a tent remain in the land, it will again be laid waste, but as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land. See that picture there? Isaiah, you're going to preach until these people are driven away? You know, Jeremiah came on the scene and preached similarly, and people were driven away similarly into exile.

But he says there'll be a tent for the people who remain. The Babylonians will leave a tent behind just to till the land and make it prosperous. But do you ever notice, Isaiah, says God, that when the oak is cut down and the terebinth is cut down, these tree stumps are left lying in the ground.

You ever notice that there's life in the stump? Have you ever noticed that a shoot will begin to spring out of the stump and the tree will begin to grow again? Isaiah, your ministry will be very discouraging to you. You won't see any fruit yourself, but there is a delayed fruitfulness. There is a delayed fruitfulness.

But that seed, the 10%, God said, of the population, the tent that will remain, will become the seeds that will produce what he calls life, what he calls the holy seed, will be the stump in the land. Here's the word holy again. You see, when you've met a holy God and you've received his cleansing, you've been made holy yourself and you plant holy seed, as he talks about here, the stump, it's holy seed.

It'll produce a holy harvest eventually. I think I've said this to you before, that it says, with God, nothing is impossible. We can read that two ways.

With God, nothing's impossible. He can do anything. He can, you know, jump over the moon.

He can do anything. Well, that's true, of course. I like to read that verse in another way too.

But when it says, with God, nothing is impossible, it means that with God, it is impossible that nothing ever happens. Something is inevitable. So with God, Isaiah, you're receiving a commission.

You're gonna preach to people whose ears are shut, whose eyes are closed, whose hearts are calloused, but it's impossible that nothing will happen when you're obeying God. Something's gonna happen. You may well long be buried, Isaiah, but this stump, this tent, will have a holy seed in it, life in the stump that'll begin to regrow again.

That's why God has given us not just Isaiah 1 to 39, which is Isaiah's experience before the exile, but his prophetic understanding of what happened when the people would come back. And Isaiah 40 to 66 is one of the richest sections of the Bible in seeing the sovereignty of God and the work of God and the fruit of God being worked out in his people. But you see, when you've seen God, you don't have to be successful anymore.

Those things aren't important. If you haven't really met with God, then success is probably important to us. Having things to show for it are probably important to us, but when you've really met with God, there's only one thing that matters, that you obey him and you trust him.

And if you obey him and he sends you into what seems like a wilderness of ministry where you're gonna be rejected and turned their back on you and their hearts are gonna be calloused towards you and they're gonna get harder as you go on, that's okay because the issue is not my own comfort or my own success. The issue is that I obey what he says and I trust who he is to bring about his purpose in the course of time, and he will. It's part of the revolution of his worldview.

And so when he met God in all his holiness, his view of God changed, his view of himself changed, his view of his work changed, his view of the world changed. And so will yours. And so will mine.

You can't orchestrate a meeting with God like this. We just need in humility to be saying, Lord, please be revealing yourself to me. As I turn to your word and I read it, I do so with the expectation, God, that you will speak to me through it.

What you say is your business. You'll tell me what's on the page, but you'll also speak to my heart in a way that's very personal and very deep as you reveal yourself. As I respond to you, I become available to you.

The holiness of God is something to be experienced, as I teach it. And out of that encounter, a life and ministry that when you get to heaven, you'll discover, although you don't see it at the time, maybe it was a work of God. As I didn't know he was leaving us the longest book in the Old Testament.

He didn't know that. He just knew he'd met with God in all his beauty and holiness. He'd seen himself.

Woe is me. Who shall go for me? Here am I. Send me. I don't care about the consequences.

I only care they please you. It's a very relaxing way to live, you know, once you come to that. You don't have to prove anything to anybody.

You just live day by day in dependence and obedience. And God in his holiness will do a holy work through us. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you tonight that the God whom Isaiah saw is the God who lives and to whom we're speaking right now. Thank you for revealing yourself to us in all kinds of ways in history and revealing yourself in your son, the Lord Jesus, who is the exhibition of your glory to us. Thank you for revealing yourself to us through your word.

Thank you for revealing yourself by your spirit. We want to see you and seeing you realize how big you are, how clean you are, how small we are in contrast, how dirty we are in contrast, and yet you reach down and you touch us too and you cleanse us and you make your habitation, your holy habitation, not just in the heavens, but in our hearts, the hearts of those who are lowly and contrite. Make us people, we pray, who long to know you more than anything else in all the world.

And in knowing you, find everything else in life simply falls into place. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/16/SID16887.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-price/holiness-of-god/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net