

I Saw the Lord!

by Steve Gallagher

Steve Gallagher's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of encountering God's holiness as illustrated through Isaiah's vision after the death of King Uzziah.

Duration: 42:14

Scripture: Leviticus 19:2, Isaiah 1:12-14, Isaiah 6:6-10, Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Isaiah"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preparing one's heart to receive the word of God. He encourages listeners to consecrate themselves and not evade the reality of their spiritual condition. The preacher references biblical figures like Isaiah, Micaiah, Daniel, and John, who all had powerful encounters with God and saw Him as the great I am. He highlights the need for humility and true worship, emphasizing that worship is not just singing songs but bowing down before God.

Transcript

I want to share out of Isaiah 6 and talk about the vision that Isaiah had as a young prophet. You know, a vision means that you see something, right? It's something happened and you are seeing something, and that's what we want to talk about. Before we get into the vision, I'm going to set the stage back in 2 Chronicles 26.

I want to establish what was going on in Isaiah's life and in the country and so on. Because King Uzziah was the king during Isaiah's upbringing all the way to this point. And King Uzziah was a great king.

In fact, he was the greatest king that Judah had had since King Solomon. You know, there were bad kings, a lot of bad kings. There were kings that were so-so.

But there wasn't a great king that came along until Uzziah came along. And 2 Chronicles 26, I'm just going to read two phrases out of this chapter to just kind of grasp what this man did. Out of verse 5, As long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him.

As long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him. And then over the next ten verses or so, it tells the story of all that God did to bless this man, bless his reign, bless his kingdom and that country of Judah. And then in verse 15, it just kind of sums it all up with the last sentence in that verse.

It says, Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong. So what we have here is a king who brought something back to the Jewish people. He restored the prosperity of Judah.

And he restored the prestige of Judah. And he restored the pride in Judah. He brought the people back into national greatness that they had not seen in a couple hundred years or so.

So the people loved him. You know, they just venerated this man. He was their hero.

He was like David of old in a sense, you know, because he was a great king. He made their nation strong again. But something happened.

And we find out in verse 16, a kind of an unraveling occurs. It says, But when he became strong, when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly. And then it goes into the story of what happened.

Basically, this man was strong in himself. You know, when God starts blessing, that's one of the problems that comes with it, is you start to take credit. You start to take Him for granted.

You start to assume that things are going to always be this way, and you can become prideful very easily, especially when you're at the top. And that's what happened with Uzziah. And he became so prideful that he actually went into the temple and decided to take it upon himself to do some of the priestly duties in there where it was expressly forbidden for anyone to do that other than a priest.

And as soon as he began to do this, the priest rushed in and they tried to get him out of there, and he went into a rage. Why? Because he was full of pride. And as soon as he reacted that way, God smote him with leprosy.

And he spent the last 10 years, 12 years of his life, it's not exactly clear how long it continued on, but he died a slow lingering death. The death of a leper. It was a horrible death.

It was a shameful death. He had to be quarantined in a house off by himself. You understand? And if he were to come around people, he would have to cover his face and say, unclean, unclean! This is this mighty king who has been reduced to this.

And during this time that he's in this terrible condition, his son Jotham kind of took over the oversight of Judah. He was probably a good man, a decent man, but not a dynamic leader like his father. So the nation is doing okay.

You know, they're still enjoying the strength and the prosperity that Uzziah had brought in, but kind of a decline that went on there for a while. And then finally the year came, I think it was about 739 BC, that Uzziah finally succumbed to this dread disease, leprosy. And he died.

And something died in the national pride that year. Something happened when Uzziah died. The bright hopes of a star-struck nation died with him.

This is the setting now, if you want to open up to Isaiah 6, this is the setting for what happens next. Because see, God will have no rivals. Sometimes God has to move this way to accomplish what he wants to accomplish.

The problem with the Jewish people were they had become comfortable with God. They were taking him for granted. They were assuming that his blessings were on their life when they really weren't.

In fact, in the first chapter of Isaiah, you see it come out of Isaiah. It's just like the passion of God, the disappointment that God had with his people, the sadness just came boiling out of him. Let me just read it.

He said, "...Hear the word of the Lord. What are your multiplied sacrifices to me, says the Lord? I've had enough of burnt offerings. Who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring your worthless offerings to me no longer.

Your incense is an abomination to me. I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts.

They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them." So you see that this is what the people were in. Self-strength, if you understand what I mean by that.

You know, sometimes when God has blessed, those blessings continue multiplying over a period of time and you're resting in the blessings of God that maybe were fought through sometime in the past. But the problem is we can get to where we're resting in the blessings of God and lose sight of our need for Him. Lose sight of that great cry in our heart to have Him.

And I believe that Isaiah as a young man was at a crossroads right here. You know, up to this point, he was willing to tell the people what they needed to hear. He was a step or two above the average person out there.

You know, maybe a few steps above them. And he could see that things weren't right and he was willing to tell them what was wrong. But I believe that he too was worshiping Uzziah.

Uzziah was a hero to him. Uzziah was a sign of strength. Uzziah was the national figure.

And I believe that Isaiah was kind of coming up in that same mindset. Not as corrupt as the people, and I'm not saying that, but I'm just saying it was probably affecting him. And then something happened.

Uzziah dies and all the strength of the nation just kind of drains away. But dear ones, a lot of times when we face discouragement, when we face hardship or devastation, it's because God is preparing us for something. He's preparing us to get a sight of something.

Something that means much more than our comfy little lives in America. Anyway, let's just look at this tremendous vision. Verse 1, in the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord.

Can you imagine? I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted with the train of His robe filling the temple. What an amazing thing. This was a new beginning for this young man.

You know, if he wasn't doing it right before, I don't know if that's true. It seems kind of like that's the case. But if that's the case, he had a new, fresh start with his ministry now.

And so often that's the way the Lord works with His people. Moses' ministry began at the burning bush. Samuel's ministry began when the Lord called his name.

Ezekiel's ministry began as he was sitting by the river Shebaar in Babylonia. Paul's ministry began on the road to Damascus. All of these men and many others began their work for God with the sight of the Lord.

A great sight of the Lord. Well, Isaiah continued ministering for another 50 or 60 years and much of that time was very difficult. In fact, he ended up dying a terrible martyr's death.

So, when you have gotten a sight of the Lord like this, you know something? It not only sticks with you, it grows inside of you. There have been so many times that I have been at men's meetings, conferences, church services, where the preacher was a carnal man who operated in the realm of emotions. This isn't a man that you get a sense has been on his face before God praying for people.

This isn't a man who understands what it means to bear with souls. Who has a true love of God in his heart for other people. What I'm talking about is a man who operates out of the flesh.

Maybe he's got a great personality, knows how to rouse the crowd or whatever. I have seen a man who operates I've seen so many of these guys come and go. They get people all whipped up into an emotional frenzy.

People walk out of there saying, praise the Lord, God has been with us today. No, God has not been with you. You've been in emotions.

That's all you've been in. And two days later, the whole experience is gone, it's withered up, and people are right back in the flesh. But when you have met with God, dear ones, it's not like that.

It's something gets planted inside of you. It doesn't go away. It grows.

It flourishes. It gets stronger as time goes on when you have really met with the Lord. That's the difference.

And that's why this man and Moses and the others could go on year after year facing incredible hardships because they met with God. They saw the Lord. One more thing I'll just mention before I move on is just to clear something up.

It's one of those things people wonder about because the Bible says no man can see the Lord and live. And yet, we just now heard that he saw the Lord. So which is it? Well, let me just say first of all that God is Spirit and you can only see this spiritual being with the spiritual eyes of your heart.

You understand? You could not see God with your physical eyes and live through it. It would be so devastating. You would drop dead on the spot.

Any of us would. No one could see God, this awesome being. We couldn't handle seeing Him.

So what he saw was through the spiritual eyes of his heart. But even at that, you have to understand the sight he was given of the Lord was but a tiny fragment of the reality of God. How does the finite see the infinite? How does a mortal see immortality itself? How does a temporal being comprehend the great eternal? This is the God who holds the universe in the palm of His hand.

How does He dumb Himself down to where a puny human being could look at Him even with the spiritual eyes and see Him? Verse 2, Seraphim stood around Him, each having six wings. With two He covered His face and with two He covered His feet and with two He flew. Now, as insignificant as they are, the scene

now opens up for Isaiah and he begins to see that there's other beings in this setting as well.

You have to understand as mighty as an angel, a Seraphim, what is that? I don't know what it is. Is that an archangel? I don't know. What's a cherubim? I don't know.

The Seraphim, I'm saying this wrong, a seraph is singular and a seraphim is plural. That's what that means. But these beings, they must have been tremendous compared to a man, but yet there is the Almighty there and even having dumbed Himself down, if I could put it that way, I don't even like using that term, but even to minimize the form of His majesty must have been like a mosquito flying around compared to this mighty God.

But nevertheless, there are other beings in the scene and there are others in Scripture that have had a sight of the Lord. Let me just read a couple of them to you just to kind of give a little fuller picture of what this throne room was like. Micaiah said, I saw the Lord sitting on His throne and all the hosts of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left.

Man, who can comprehend that? Daniel said, I kept looking until thrones were set up and the Ancient of Days took His seat. Thousands upon thousands were attending Him and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court sat and the books were opened.

What a scene! And John, of course, in Revelation 4, a throne was standing in heaven and one sitting on the throne. Around the throne were 24 thrones and upon the thrones, I saw 24 elders sitting clothed in white garments and golden crowns on their heads. Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.

And before the throne, there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Now the interesting thing to me is that all four of these men, Isaiah, Micaiah, Daniel, and John, the first thing they see is the great I Am. He overwhelms the senses, I'm sure.

You know, if I could put it that way. And then they begin to notice other things. Only after they see the Lord.

Alright, verse 3. One called out to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory. In Revelation 4, this is expanded a little bit.

It says, They rest not day and night saying, Holy, holy, holy. So for all these thousands of years, these seraphim, these mighty angelic beings have been flying around the throne of God and all they can say is, Holy, holy, holy! It might seem like they're robots or something and they just have been programmed to do that and that's all they are ever going to do. It's not like that.

They have intellects and they have feelings and so on. And I think what it is, is that God is so incomprehensible. He's so tremendous that these beings just keep getting a fresh sight of this Almighty God and every fresh little sight of Him, it just elicits forth another round of these holies.

But let me just talk about holiness for a second. What is holiness? I bet you're thinking, moral perfection, sinlessness. Is that right? Is that about what you're thinking? Then what's righteousness? Are they the same? Moral perfection is righteousness.

Sinlessness is righteousness. A God who always does the right thing. That's God's righteousness.

Holiness is a completely different thing. The word in the Hebrew, kadash, what it means literally, is to be apart from something. To be separated.

To be distinct. To be at a distance of something. There is a definite sense of a great separation and especially when you are talking about the holiness of God, you are talking about an insurmountable gulf between God and everything else.

He is the Great Other, if I could put it that way. He stands in a realm all His own. No being.

No human. No man. He is nothing like any of us.

And we are so insignificant compared to this mighty God. So holiness, when we're talking about the holiness of God, we are talking about a being that is so completely different and far from anything that we can comprehend. He is the incomparable One.

As it says in Isaiah 40, to whom then will you liken me? That I would be His equal, says the Holy One. And then in Isaiah 57, we find Him as the Exalted One. For thus says the High and Exalted One who lives forever, whose name is holy, I will dwell in a high and holy place.

Samuel presented Him different. Who is able to stand before Jehovah, this holy God? He is the unapproachable One. He dwells in unapproachable light.

And He is so completely different. So far above man. I am God and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee, he says in Hosea 11.

It's God's total otherness. The seraphim are saying, holy is God! He is the being that is so far beyond any of us! And they say, the Lord of hosts, Yahweh sabaoth. Yahweh sabaoth.

Yahweh, my definition of Yahweh, the self-existent, independent, immutable, ever-present, all-filling I Am. That's Yahweh. That is this holy God who stands distinctly apart from all created beings.

That sight is what Israel lacked. Israel knew how to do the religious thing of their day. And can I tell you, dear ones, it's not much different than today's American Christianity.

There's not a lot of difference. We have our little churchy things we do. We show up on Sunday.

We go through our rituals and stuff. Our rituals are just different than their rituals. It's not much difference really.

The question is, have we had a sight of this Lord? Do we live in sight of who this God is and who we are before Him? Let's continue on here. Verse 4, And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, woe is me, for I am ruined, because I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

The Living Bible says that last verse a little different. Let me just read. I like the way they said it.

Then I said, my doom is sealed, for I am a foul-mouthed sinner, a member of a sinful, foul-mouthed race. That is someone who saw the Lord. And that always happens when people get a sight of Him.

This word ruined that he used is the same term that's used when describing a country that has been invaded by a foreign army and the army comes through and just rapes and pillages and ravages the whole country. They destroy the olive groves. They stop up wells.

They throw rocks in the fields. They tear down buildings. And by the time they're done, that country lays in ruins.

It's been completely devastated. That's what it's like, dear ones, when you have gotten a sight of the Lord. How can you experience God like that and stand strong in yourself? You can't.

But you know something? There should be a sense of that in the conversion experience. You see it in the prodigal son. He came to his senses in the pig pen and all of a sudden, he realized, I have sinned! You know, have you ever experienced God that way? It's too easy to just play the Christian religious game.

Some of you young people, you've grown up in it. Have you had an experience with God for yourself? Or have you just learned to pattern yourself after what everyone else is doing? It doesn't make you a Christian, dear ones. Just because you sing the songs and you come to church and you're not out living the party life and all that, it doesn't mean that you are one of God's own.

Job is kind of a picture of this as well. You see in the first chapter of Job, it says, Job was a righteous man, blameless. He was a good man, but he had kind of gotten in some kind of a comfortable thing with God.

And he was a good man. He was living a good life. But you know, when everything starts, the devastations come, the enemy attacks, and all of that happens.

Who Job is kind of comes out in that book. And then all of a sudden, I think it's chapter 36, all of a sudden, God arrives. And God starts to speak to Job.

And just sends a word that just shoots through his being. And this is where it left him. He said, I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes have seen you.

Wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. That's what happens when you see the Lord. Alexander McLaren said, Such an experience would doubtless occur in many more cases were it not for our successful efforts at evasion.

We endeavor to get away from reality, I would say. We endeavor to get away from the great reality and take refuge in what is superficial. We flatter ourselves into the deep stupor of self-complacency by the cry, peace, peace, when there is no peace.

Alright, verse 6, Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, Behold, this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven. Then 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.

Now it's interesting that the Lord is not looking to send these seraphim out to evangelize the world. You would think these holy beings that are perfectly reflecting God's glory, these fiery, burning beings, that's what seraphim means, is they are burning. It's like a fire that absorbs all the impurities into itself.

That is what a seraphim is. I mean, just my poor human logic, I would think, well, God, why don't You send them to go and evangelize the world? But that isn't the way the Lord works. He doesn't do things like that.

No, He sends redeemed sinners to reach mankind. You know, think about the seraph for a minute. Actually, these seraphim are like innocent children.

Innocent in the sense that they've never been tarnished by sin. But there's another side to that. They can only see the Lord in a certain way.

Until you have run the gamut of sin and understood the emptiness, the futility of life without God, until you know what it means to come crashing down in life at a complete and utter end of your own abilities, coming to an end of self, until you have experienced how sin ravishes your soul and depletes you and corrupts you, and then in that sorrowful, terrible condition to have a pure Redeemer step into your life and rescue you. How can you really comprehend who God is? You know, so these seraphim, yes, they're innocent like a child is innocent. Lacking sin and corruption, but they don't have the sight of the Lord that a redeemed sinner has.

They don't really understand the Lord. Okay, verse 9. He said, "...Go and tell this people, keep on listening, but do not perceive. Keep on looking, but do not understand.

Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull and their eyes dim. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed." So, we see the scenes shift now off of God and His throne room, and all of a sudden, Isaiah is given a sight of people. People who have grown very hardened to the Gospel, if I could put it that way.

It's the people in chapter 1. They know how to do the religious thing. They know how to come and trample the courts. Every Sunday, they're there.

They know how to sing the song. They know how to do the religious thing. The Lord said it in Isaiah 29.

He said, "...This people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me." Their hearts, the center of their being, their real affection, the core of who they are, they keep locked away from Me because they don't want Me. And that was the heartbreaking reality that God had to live with. That the people He loved didn't want Him.

I wonder how much we want Him. And you know, when He said, the Lord said, I hate the sacred assembly and iniquity. What He's talking about there is the mixture.

You know, go one way or the other. I've told men this for 25 years. If you want to serve Baal, then serve Baal.

Go for it! It'd be better for you to just go and throw yourself into sin than to have this mixture in your life of the self-life, the pride, the selfishness, living for yourself, going your own way, living in self-will, doing your own thing in life, and then going to church and mixing in with it a little bit of religiosity. This is the thing that God hates. It's the lukewarmness that causes Jesus to want to throw up.

This hardness of heart comes about from hearing sacred things, but living in self-will. That's where people grow hard. Sinners are hardened in a certain way.

I mean, you get out of the church building, people who never go to church, yeah, they're hardened by sin, but they're not hardened in the same way that church people are hardened. We've grown hardened to the Gospel. Kathy and I were just in Holland last month preaching at a revival conference.

Those people were so hungry for the Lord. What a blessing it was! I mean, they hung on every word. They wanted anything.

Anything the Lord would bring them. When they put that conference online, it was limited to 1,200 people because it was at a retreat center. You had to sign up for it online.

It sold out in 15 minutes. 1,200 people in that little nation of Holland. I mean, they are hungry for God.

They're hungry for God. Alright, now I want to wrap it up and I just want to try to bring it back here to America, if I could say it that way. My sense in all the years of dealing in the church and traveling and preaching in hundreds of churches and all the places I've been and so on, there are people who are sincere.

I know there's people in this church here who are sincere, who truly do seek the Lord and truly do want to obey Him and please Him with their lives. And I find that everywhere I go, there's always that remnant, those people who are earnest about the things of God. But generally speaking, the church on the whole, I guess I could say they have a very small sight of God.

He's very tiny in their daily lives. And all their other interests, all the loves of their lives, all the idols, all the different things they give themselves over to and so on are huge. Yes, God gets Sunday morning, but the sight of God in their eyes, you just don't get the sense that God is very big.

And you know, it comes out in the way people live their lives. I've made a living, as much as I hate to say it, but I've made a living for the last 25 years ministering to Christians. Christians in all kinds of perversions.

How could it be? How could it be? Because God is so tiny. He's so tiny. We have very low thoughts of God.

Most people that I've talked to, their mentality about the Lord is He's kind of like me, He's just bigger. You know, He's just a bigger version of me. You know, I'm a nice person.

I'm a good person. And God's kind of like that. He's a little better, I know, but He's just bigger than me.

He's like me, you know? No, God is altogether different than any of us. I'll tell you this, you go to the Christian bookstore and there's a whole self-help section. There's all kinds of books.

Ten easy steps on how to walk with God and all of that. Dear ones, I want to tell you, you can read books, you can listen to Christian radio, you can hear sermons, whatever, but until you have a sight of the Lord, your life will never be what it should be. It will never really amount to much.

There's a place for that. I want to read something Pope of Commentary wrote. There are moments when God sweeps by, when we have shut ourselves up with God, an awakening and a purifying spirit, or in higher moments of devotion, we may gain a momentary glimpse of that pure love.

We should all be able to look back upon moments of our history when we have seen in the inner chamber of the mind something of what Isaiah saw. Those seasons in which God approaches most near to the soul and communicates most directly with us are momentous. They constitute epochs in our spiritual history.

And again, I ask you, you know, just between you and the Lord, it's none of my business. But I just ask you, have you had those experiences? Have you had those times when God has moved in close and revealed Himself and revealed you to where you could see yourself as Isaiah saw himself and all he could think of to say was unclean, unclean. Have you had those times? Maybe it's something you desire.

Maybe you haven't. Maybe this little message here has stirred something in you. I hope so.

What do you do? You can't make God suddenly appear to you, obviously. It's a sovereign move of the Lord. We can't demand it of Him.

There is something we can do. We can prepare our hearts. That was the one thing God said about the children of Israel in the wilderness.

They did not prepare their hearts to meet the Lord. They never prepared their hearts. They went on day after day, the pillar of fire in their midst, but they never prepared their hearts.

They became familiar with the sacred things, but they never prepared their hearts. And it's interesting to me that the one time that Jesus quoted back on this passage right here about how the people will hear, but they won't hear, and they'll see, but they won't see, and all of that. The one time that Jesus referred to that is in Matthew 13, right in the middle of the parable of the sower and the seed.

And what's that all about? The soil of your heart. And Jesus gave that parable of the four different types of soils. Remember, the seed is always pure.

It's the Word of God, the eternal Word of life. It always comes to that soil, but it's the heart. Some people would say, well, if I was born with a bad heart, then I'm just doomed.

There's nothing I can do. No, that's not true. You can doom yourself by complacency and apathy, but there is something you can do.

You can prepare your heart. Let me just touch on three things real quick, and I'm going to wrap it up and give it over to Jack. Number one is you can consecrate yourself.

You can consecrate yourself. Leviticus, the Lord said, consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am holy. Be separate as I am separate.

Be distinct as I am distinct. In other words, our lives, if we are truly believers, there should be something in our lives that stands out dramatically different from the unbelievers around us. If we're watching the same television shows, if we're laughing at the same carnal jokes, if we're involved in the same things, if we rush out of here to go watch a football game like all the rest of the unsaved world, how are we any different? How have we separated ourselves? How have we made ourselves a peculiar people worthy of such a God as this? How are we any different? Because we went to church? I'm not mad at you.

You understand that, right? But this is something we can do. We can make a commitment. Lord, if I have to start making some sacrifices in my life so that I can get myself in a position to get a sight of You, then I'll do it because I'm desperate.

I can't just continue going on week after week in dead religion. A second thing is to become a seeker. Now, don't get offended, but I'm going to tell you what Jesus said and I'm going to explain it to you.

He said, Do not give what is holy to dogs. Do not cast pearls before swine. And He's simply describing a law of the Kingdom of God.

That God doesn't do that. In other words, if we don't have any desire for God, He is not going to just suddenly flash forth on your life and open Himself up to you when you have shown by your apathy, your lack of hunger, your lack of interest that you really don't care. He's not going to throw those pearls before you.

The great pearl is Jesus Himself who died on a cross to purchase people for Himself. Become a seeker after God. Set aside a time that is His.

That is His. Every day. And number three is humble yourself.

Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord, says in James 4. What I want to say about that is it very much has to do with worship. Worship is not coming into the sanctuary once a week and singing our nice little Christian songs. The word worship, whether it's in the Hebrew or the Greek, the word worship means literally to bow down before someone greater than yourself.

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