

Our family was in the Rocky Mountains last month. We watched the sunset at 12,000 feet elevation straddling the Continental Divide, the line on our continent where if you pour a cup of water on the ground on one side of the line, it eventually flows to the Pacific Ocean, and if you pour a cup of water on the other side, it flows to the Atlantic Ocean. We were so high up, seeing all the breathtaking peaks, and I kept saying to Keren, “I feel so small. I feel so small.” My sense of importance and significance was dwarfed as I felt like an ant next to the mountains, and yet Psalm 97:5 says that those mountains melt like wax in God’s presence. Think about that: 12,000 feet of limestone and shale, granite and gold dripping like wax off a candlestick in the presence of God. That’s who God is. I believe today, we are in desperate need of reawakening to that aspect of God’s character. As we continue in our **God is _____** sermon series, today we are going to focus on the reality that **God is holy**. The prophet Isaiah had an encounter with God in which he discovered God’s holiness in a way that revolutionized his life. I want us to spend time focusing on his experience. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Isaiah 6.

As you are turning there, I want to point out that at different seasons of life, based upon what’s going on in the world around us, we have the tendency to focus on certain aspects of God’s character. When you think about your wedding day, it’s natural to think about Jesus being a groom and the church being His bride. When you have a child, it’s natural to think about God being our Father who calls us His sons and daughters. When we go through seasons of isolation or loneliness, we focus on God being our friend; when we are sick, we focus on God being our healer; when we need wisdom, we think about God being a great counselor. There are so many different aspects of God’s character that we naturally gravitate to and focus on based on our situation in life. But one area that we often neglect or ignore is the holiness of God. The other attributes of God seem relevant to us; they are useful to us, so we are drawn to them. But God’s holiness seems like a threat to us, so we often stay away from it. Hundreds of years ago, when people spoke and wrote about God, they often began by expressing a profound sense of reverence, awe, and wonder. They focused on God reigning in heaven, robed in majesty, His thoughts and His ways infinitely higher than our own. These days, our tendency is to focus on a God who is near, a God who is love, a God who is compassionate, merciful, and forgiving. God is all those things, but God is not only those things that comfort us and make us feel good. There are also aspects of God that unsettle us, that intimidate us, that leave us speechless.

Let’s start reading in Isaiah 6:1. “In the year that King Uzziah died . . .” Uzziah was king for 52 years during an economically and militaristically prosperous time, a time of national success and pride. When any long-reigning king dies, there is an enormous power vacuum in his wake, and with that vacuum comes uncertainty and fear. When Uzziah died, this was especially the case in light of the Assyrian armies who were knocking on the door of Israel’s northern border. Think about the turnover we have as a nation every four to eight years, and all the uncertainty and change that comes with a different presidential administration. In the last 52 years our nation has been led by Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden—ten different leaders. The Israelites only had one. So when he died, no one knew what was going to happen. There was uncertainty, hesitancy, and fear. And in that moment, at a time of national and personal need, Isaiah says, “I saw the Lord” (6:1).

This was not a picture of the humble Messiah, riding on a donkey, washing feet, divesting himself of power, and allowing himself to be arrested by his enemies. No, this Lord was, “high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (6:1) The temple was over 200 feet tall, and the train of His robe was like the hem of His robe, like the hem of your pants. This is a big God.

“Above him were seraphim” (6:2). Seraphim are angels, but don’t think about a chubby little baby sitting on a cloud wearing a diaper. The word seraphim means “burning one.” These are mighty heavenly creatures engulfed in flames, “each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying” (6:2). Just like Moses had to take off his shoes in the presence of God, the seraphim had to cover their feet. Even though these angels had never sinned, they were constantly aware of their unworthiness to be in the presence of God. Looking at God would have been like staring at an eclipse; His glory would blind them, so they covered their faces.

“And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory’” (6:3). This is a Hebrew way of communicating that God’s holiness is unmatched and unrivaled. In Hebrew, when you want to say that something is the best of its kind, you repeat the word. In Genesis, when people came to a large hole in the ground, they called it a “hole hole” because it was an enormous hole. In 2 Chronicles, when they were describing the purest gold, they said, “gold gold.” Repeating a word was a way to emphasize quality and greatness. Only once in the entire Bible is a word repeated three times in a row: “God is holy, holy, holy.” His holiness is so superlative, so beyond comprehension and description they just kept repeating it, over and over. Don’t think of holy plus holy plus holy; think of holy times holy times holy. This is not addition but exponential multiplication. This is Isaiah straining the confines of language to say that God is God, He is unlike anything in this world. It’s not that He is holy in a moral or an ethical sense, but in an ontological sense. He is a different category of being. He is deity. He is altogether perfect.

“At 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! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty’” (6:4-5). Just when Isaiah thinks it’s over for him, we read this:

Then one of the seraphim 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.” 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!” (6:6-7)

Isaiah had a revelation of God’s holiness and it changed him; it revolutionized everything about him. My hope and prayer is that as a church, we would have a revelation of God’s holiness, and that it would change us, revolutionizing everything about our lives. Let me show you what happens following a revelation of God’s holiness.

A revelation of God’s holiness recenters our worldview. This entire vision begins with Isaiah saying, “At a time when it seemed like our world was falling apart, when our long reigning king had died, when the safety, security and prosperity of our nation was so uncertain, when we didn’t know what was next, I saw God.” And God wasn’t consulting books to come up with a good response to the crisis of the day. He wasn’t biting His fingers in anxiety, wondering whether His plan was going to work out or not. “I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne.” He was reigning, He was ruling, He was governing the galaxies with confidence and complete control. That vision of God in His holiness reoriented Isaiah’s worldview, and we need that to happen to us. When we see God in his unveiled holiness, out of necessity every illicit and competing claim for supremacy in our lives will be dethroned and God alone will be left in His rightful place. When you see a holy God seated on the throne, American politics gets dethroned—God reigns supreme. When you see a holy God seated on the throne, professional ambition gets dethroned—God reigns supreme. Obsession with image, appearance and reputation gets dethroned—God reigns supreme. Sports, social media, and entertainment get dethroned—God reigns supreme. Family gets dethroned—God reigns supreme. When you see a holy God seated on the throne, you get dethroned—God reigns supreme. Instead of God being fit into your agenda, God becomes your agenda.

I remember what it was like when I started dating Keren. Before we were together, I thought I had a full schedule; I thought I was busy, and I had a hard time fitting almost anything else on the calendar. But then Keren was willing to spend time with me—and her dad finally let me spend time with her—and everything got reoriented around her. If I could spend time with Keren, golfing was not even a consideration, time with friends was cut in half, I didn't even care about sleep anymore. One more moment with Keren was all I wanted. Every priority and opportunity shifted to center around her. From my perspective, I believe Keren is the best person on the planet, so it makes perfect sense to reorient my schedule around her. But all her beauty, her wisdom, her grace, her warmth, her love—they're nothing compared to the beauty, the wisdom, the grace, the warmth, and the love of God. And when we see Him for who He truly is, we see Him in his holiness, seated on the throne. Every priority and opportunity have to be reoriented around Him, and our worldview is recentered and set right.

A revelation of God's holiness results in awe and wonder. Think about what Isaiah was experiencing when he saw the Lord. There was a full frontal assault on all his senses. He saw God's glory, he smelled the smoke that filled the temple, he heard the angelic creatures declare God's holiness. Isaiah says, "At the sound of their voice the doorposts and the thresholds shook" (6:4). The temple was built with stone and gold, and the doorposts and the threshold were the most stable parts of the building, so imagine the volume if even they are quaking. We've all stood in front of a speaker with a heavy bass and felt the rumble in our chest. If the doorposts and the thresholds of a solid rock building are shaking, imagine what's happening to Isaiah himself. In this moment in Isaiah's life God moved from a concept to a reality. God moved from a distant deity who he would nod to when needed to a God who he could not help but spend the rest of his life bowing before. Just like Isaiah was moved to awe and wonder at the holiness of God, we need that in our lives as well.

We have grown too accustomed to a domesticated god. We've become habituated to His glory and take Him for granted. When I was 16 years old, my family moved from Las Vegas to Denver. I remember when I first moved to town, for months, every time I looked west, I would see the Rocky Mountains in the distance, with their snow-capped peaks, and say, "Look at that. It's so beautiful." I remember for the first several months we lived in Colorado, often in the evening I would go on a walk to the park near our house, sit on a bench and just gaze at the sun setting over the mountains, with every shade of gold and orange, purple and pink. I was awestruck. Trust me: you don't see beauty like that in Las Vegas, and up until that point, Las Vegas was all I knew. But after a few months of living in Colorado, do you know what happened? I lived there long enough that I got habituated to it. Those 14,000 foot mountains eventually got incorporated into my new reality, and I began to think it was normal to live next to that backdrop. Slowly but surely my sense of awe and wonder began to fade. I took them for granted. How often does that happen in our relationship with God? At one point in our lives, we felt like we were at the cross where He gave his life for us. We remember going under the water and feeling a rush of acceptance, love, forgiveness, and power. We've raised our hands in a moment of worship, captivated by His beauty. But then, over the course of time, we slowly but surely get habituated to God's grandeur, we take Him for granted. And like Isaiah, we need a fresh vision of His holiness so that we are once again arrested with awe and wonder.

A revelation of God's holiness reveals our complete inadequacy. When Isaiah saw God's splendor and majesty, he said, "Woe to me, I am ruined" (6:5). Woe is an important word to understand. It's basically the exact opposite of "wow." Wow means great, awesome, wonderful. Woe means terrible, horrible, dreadful. It's basically a word of condemnation, a declaration that someone is under a curse. This is a fascinating turn of events for Isaiah. As a prophet, Isaiah was used to saying "woe" to people who were living in sin. Turn back just one chapter and you'll see six different times that Isaiah said "woe"—woe to the arrogant, woe to the greedy, woe to the dishonest, woe to those who oppose the poor and

marginalized, woe to those who disregard the Lord. As a prophet, Isaiah was accustomed to telling other people that they would come under divine judgment because of their sin. But then he sees God in all His holiness and what does he say? “Woe to me!” He no longer says, “You are going to be ruined.” Now he says, “I am ruined.” If all we ever do is look at ourselves and other people, we will inevitably end up defending ourselves and condemning them. But if we look up to heaven and see the holiness of God, every vain illusion of superiority, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency will evaporate and we will realize just how desperate we really are.

I want to open a window in my own life at this moment, because this hits me in a very personal way. Like Isaiah was a professional prophet, I’m a professional pastor. I study the Bible and pray and talk about God for a living. Because of lifestyle choices I’ve made, certain temptations don’t have a ton of pull on me. I’m not tempted to swear when I’m around my friends, I’m not tempted to drink and party, I’m not tempted to withhold my tithe (I love giving), I’m not tempted to be unfaithful to my wife (I love her with all my heart). There are a lot of temptations that just don’t have a lot of pull on me right now, but do you know the temptation that does? Self-righteousness—a smug sense of elitism and spiritual superiority, where I find myself thinking, “You know what, Dan? Other people are pretty messed up, but you’re a pretty good guy.” Whenever I find those thoughts filling my mind, it’s a sign that I have not spent enough time gazing on God and reveling in his Holiness. The holiness of God is always the antidote to the self-righteousness of man. John Calvin put it this way: “Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance until they have contrasted themselves with the majesty of God.”

A few days ago, I came home from work and my son ran to me, gave me a big hug, and told me he loved me. Then he took my hand, led me to the counter, showed me a watercolor painting that he had made and said, “Look Daddy, it’s a masterpiece.” I don’t know; maybe compared to an average two-year-old, it might have even been great. I’m glad Hudson has a healthy self-confidence. But sooner or later he’s going to realize that what he thinks is a masterpiece is no Van Gogh; it’s no Rembrandt, Picasso, or Caravaggio—it’s the work of a toddler. I think you know where I’m going here. Sometimes people have the tendency of looking at themselves and saying to anyone who will listen, “Look, a masterpiece.” And listen to me: this is not just religious people. Get on social media and you’ll see that this is all people: conservative, liberal, old, young, rich, poor, famous, forgotten. If we actually think that, we are living in the delusional world of a two-year-old. What we need to do is get our gaze off ourselves and on to the glory of God. Isaiah was a prophet and his lips were his strength, his greatest attribute, but when he saw God he cried out, “I am a man of unclean lips, I live among a people of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (6:5). Even what he thought was his greatest contribution was actually a deficit. A revelation of God’s holiness reveals our complete inadequacy, but it doesn’t leave us there.

A revelation of God’s holiness releases divine mercy. Right as Isaiah cried out, “Woe to me, I am ruined,” right when he was convinced that God’s holiness was going to destroy him, that the piercing brilliance of God’s righteousness would eviscerate him, look what happens: “Then one of the seraphim 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’” (6:6-7). This is what we so often forget about God. Yes, His holiness exposes our sin and utter inadequacy, but its ultimate purpose is not to condemn, but to restore. An x-ray machine or MRI will show you what’s really going on beneath the surface that you can’t see yourself. But when you discover that cavity, or that fractured bone, or that cancer, the goal is never to leave you in despair, but to begin treatment immediately. The same is true for God.

The Bible tells us that when Adam and Eve were first in the garden, they were naked and felt no shame. They had nothing to conceal or hide. Then they sinned. And do you know the very first thing they did after they sinned? They said, “We need to sow together fig leaves to cover ourselves up.” Isn’t that what

all of us do? We are just like them. When we sin, or are reminded of our sin, our tendency is to hide, to conceal, to cover ourselves up. With Adam and Eve, it wasn't just with the fig leaves. God came walking in the garden and they hid from the Lord in the bushes—as if hiding from God was an actual possibility. When God asked, “Where are you?” Adam replied, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid” (Genesis 3:10). He knew he had sinned. The garments he sewed together on his own weren't working any longer. He knew he was exposed and his knee jerk reaction was to hide. God talked to Adam and Eve about their rebellion. He addressed their sin and told them about the long term consequences for humanity. He even told them that because of this sin, His son was going to have to come into the world and die to save humanity. He promised right there in the garden. But after that conversation, what was the very next thing God did? “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). Yes, the holiness of God will always expose our sin. But at the same time, it also releases divine mercy.

Some of you right now might be experiencing one side of God's holiness. You feel exposed. You feel convicted. The weight of your sin and selfishness, appropriately so, is crashing down on you like an avalanche and all you want to do is cover yourself up and hide. You don't have to do that. God not only exposes our sin, but He also atones for our sin, which means He pays the price for our sin. His mercy covers us up and makes us whole. And for us, this side of the incarnation, we know it wasn't done just with clothing in the garden like for Adam and Eve or with a coal from the altar like for Isaiah. Our sin was atoned for by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. On the cross, the holiness of God and the mercy of God are simultaneously on full display. John 3:16 is the most well-known verse in the entire Bible: “God so loved the world that He sent his one and only son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.” Do you know what John 3:17 says? “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” That is the heart of God for you. Yes, His holiness exposes our sins—so that in mercy He can save us from our sins. And when you see holiness and mercy at the same time like that, it does something to you; you cannot leave the same.

That leads us to our final takeaway: **a revelation of God's holiness recruits us into service.** Listen to what happened after God took away Isaiah's sin: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’” (6:8). God had an assignment He needed to be carried out, a mission He needed someone to accomplish for Him. And how did Isaiah respond? “And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (6:8). Once you see God in all His holiness, you can't spend the rest of your life doing your own thing, pursuing your own agenda, chasing your own dreams. You lay those all down and you say, “God, what is it that you want? What are you up to? What are you trying to accomplish in the world? My life is no longer mine. It's yours. Here I am. Send me.”

That was a big part of my story in becoming a pastor. God called me into ministry at a young age. When my parents were separating and I was confused and hurt and unsure, He was the glue that held me together and I felt like He was calling me to serve Him and tell others about Him. When I was in high school and my teachers asked me what I wanted to do with my life, what career path I was going to pursue, I told them I wanted to be a pastor. I remember this as clear as day—I remember where I was standing in my tenth grade history class when they laughed at me. They literally tried to talk me out of it. They said it would be a waste. But I knew in my bones what God was calling me to do, and nothing anyone could say to me could change my mind. I had already said to God, “Here I am, send me.” Obviously, you don't have to go into full time ministry to say yes to God. I don't believe in the division between the sacred and secular. You can serve God on stage with a Bible just as well as you can serve God as a cashier at a grocery store, or as a janitor sweeping the hallway, or as a manager leading a meeting, or a salesperson closing a deal. *The emphasis isn't on what you do, it's on how you do it and who you do it for.* And once you catch a glimpse of the holiness of God, no matter what you do, you do it for Him.

We began the message today by saying that a lot of people have chosen not to focus on the holiness of God. We'll focus on his love, we'll focus on his grace, we'll focus on his faithfulness, but not his holiness. We do that to our detriment! There is no way to know God fully or to worship Him rightly without an awareness of and a response to His holiness.

In 1 Peter 1:16, God's word says, "Be holy, because I am holy." This exact phrase is used six different times in the Bible. God is holy, and He wants us to be holy. In fact, holiness is so important to God that He says to us in Hebrews 12:14, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." As people and as a church, we have to see God as holy, allow His holiness to change and shape us, and then walk in holiness so that we can walk in step with God.