
**“Encountering the God who is Holy”
(Isaiah 6:1-8)
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Introduction:

NIV Isaiah 6:1-8

¹ *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.* ² *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.* ³ *And they were calling to one another:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

⁴ *At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.*

⁵ *“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 *Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.* ⁷ *With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”*

⁸ *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!”*

The beginning, middle and end of our pursuit of holiness is the holiness of God. “Be holy because I am holy” is what God says to all of us. This is the most supreme reason for us to embark on this lifelong pursuit.

Often times in our living we settle for less than the most important reasons for doing what we do. When we think of why we want to get married and why we want to work and why we want to have children and why we do this or do that, we often get stuck settling for lesser reasons for motivating us in these things. And in the worse case scenario, we don’t think about it at all. We act like robots, preprogrammed to just do what we do, without really knowing why we are doing those things.

But God didn’t create us to be that way. He created us in His image to be rational beings. And He created us to be passionate and emotional and thinking and moral and to live with a sense of deep purpose. This is the question that pastor Rick Warren asks and tries to answer in his famous book, the Purpose Driven Life. “What on earth am I here for?”

The supreme purpose and goal for all we do as human beings is rooted in the being of God. It is rooted in his character and his nature. So I think the Westminster Confession of Faith is bang-on when it asks and answers the first question of it’s lengthy confession.

Q.1 What is the chief end of humanity?

A. Human’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy God forever.

In all we do, from work to leisure, from making widgets to making babies, we do to glorify God and to enjoy God forever.

And so the same is true in our pursuit of holiness. Why should I want to be holy? Because being holy glorifies God. That should be reason enough. That should be our supreme reason. 'Be holy because I am holy.' Even for myself, in these past 3-4 weeks, I don't know how many times I've said those words. Peter, be holy because I am holy.

No longer should it be, "be holy because if you're not and you get caught, it'll be really embarrassing." No longer should it be, "be holy because by being holy, your self-image with shoot through the roof!" Let our reason for pursuing holiness be God.

If that is to be our motivation, then it must be that each one of us encounters the God who is holy. It must begin with the truth about God found in Scripture, but it must culminate in encounters with the God of Scripture. So it is good for us to listen to sermons on the holiness of God and find out what all that means. And it's good to read Jerry Bridges' book "The Pursuit of Holiness" and find out how to be more holy. But God was never meant to be merely a subject to be studied. He was meant to be worshipped, enjoyed, and obeyed. So you and I must move from knowledge of God to experience of God.

For example, say your friends want to set you up on a blind date. And so how does it usually go? It usually goes like this. "I know this guy...and then you get into a detailed description. "What's he like?" He's a real good guy. What's he look like? Well, he's not ugly. Oh boy...you know what that means... and so you keep asking questions and you keep getting answers and that's all fine and good. But you still need to have an experience with the guy. You have to decide whether or not to go on the date, have dinner, coffee, share a conversation, find out likes and dislikes, see if there is any chemistry, see if you are on the same faith journey and so on and so on.

So it must be with our relationship with God. Please do not just fill yourself up with information on the holiness of God this year. Don't merely memorize definitions and concepts. Instead strive to have deep encounters with God and his holiness. This should be our prayer before we even embark on identifying which sins to address and so on. Before we pray, Lord help me to overcome my sin of lying, it should be, Lord, allow me to encounter your holiness.

This is a frightful and dangerous prayer, but a prayer that is necessary for all of us. For you and I to pursue holiness apart from an encounter with the God who is holy, we are only doomed to failure. As we've been saying the past several weeks, God must be the reference point, the starting point of our journey in holiness. Over and over again throughout this year, as we pursue this theme, and throughout our lives, it must keep coming back to God—that he is holy and because he is holy he wants me to be, he commands me to be holy as well.

Friends this is the pattern found in Scripture. It was like this for the prophet Isaiah.

Like Isaiah you and I must see the Holiness of the Lord. (v1)

In verse 1, Isaiah saw the Lord seated on his throne and he witnessed the holiness of God. The encounter was so traumatic that his response in verse 5 was,

⁵ "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."

Encounters with God who is holy are unforgettable encounters. They are benchmarks in our spiritual journeys. They shape us. They set the course for what kind of Christian we will be. And it isn't too late to have that encounter and change course.

For Isaiah, he marks the time of this vision with the death of King Uzziah. It's as if he's saying. The year I saw the Lord, I'll never forget it. It was the year that King Uzziah died. It's like when we heard the news, "a plane has crashed into the World Trade Center". I think we all knew exactly what we were doing. I know it was a Tuesday. I was driving to the office for our regular Tuesday morning staff meeting. I'll never forget it as I was glued to the radio and later trying in vain to get on the internet.

The reality of Christian life and the record of Scripture seem to show us that God's people have powerful, life changing, yet intermittent encounters with the holiness of God. For certain we have regular, daily encounters with God and his holiness, but it seems that there are those real special moments when God unveils himself and gives us a very intimate glimpse of his holiness.

The Apostle Paul's first encounter with the holiness of God was on the Damascus road in Acts 9. The story goes like this.

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

This testimony of his encounter with Jesus he shares over and over again. When he stands before governors and political leaders or in front of a crowd of commoners, what he shares is not a theological dissertation; instead he just shares his testimony. That was the turning point of his life. It was this moment that changed the whole trajectory of his life.

Then later in his life at the end of his 2nd letter to the Corinthians he speaks of an encounter with God where he was taken to the second heavens.

¹I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— ⁴was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. (2 Corinthians 12)

Have you had similar such encounters?

Take a look at the twelve disciples. They seem to have had much of the holiness and wonder of Christ veiled for most of their time with him. But there were a couple instances where his glory was revealed. One such moment was on the Mount of Transfiguration. Before that moment, they saw Jesus merely as a man, they saw Jesus as a special man. They saw Jesus as a holy man, a powerful man, an anointed man, a spiritual man, a man very intimate and familiar with God. And

then three of the disciples were invited to a mountain retreat with Jesus. And the veil of humanity was momentarily removed and they saw the blazing white glory, shall we say the deity of Jesus. It became an unforgettable moment for Peter. He later writes in his 2nd letter,

¹⁶We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

Have you had that encounter?

Moses longed for it. If there ever was a person who loved and longed for the presence of God, it was Moses. Here are some excerpts from his life.

It begins with his encounter at the burning bush (Exodus 3) where he first encounters God in all his holiness, but it doesn't end there.

Of course there were all the miracles God performed through Moses as he was delivering the people from Egypt.

There was his personal encounter with God on Sinai where he was given the Ten Commandments.

And then there was the giving of the second edition of the commandments. And during that time we get a glimpse into the heart of Moses (Exodus 33).

¹² Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' ¹³ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

¹⁴ The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

¹⁵ Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

¹⁸ Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

²¹ Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (Exodus 33)

And of course day after day after day, Moses spend hours and hours in the presence of God in the tent of Meeting where he left with his face glowing so brightly he had to cover it up until the brightness faded.

Have you had similar encounters? This is what is most needful in our lives today. We must long and ache and pursue encounters with God, who happens to be holy.

It is very difficult to encounter God when you're doing life at a 100 miles per hour. We have to slow down and take time to pray and read and contemplate these things.

When we encounter the holiness of God we get a real glimpse of our sinfulness. As Isaiah encounters the majesty, glory and holiness of the Lord, he sees his own sinfulness. Now remember Isaiah is a holy man. He is a prophet of God. You can probably say that he's in the 90th percentile of holy people. Yet when he encounters God, he folds up like a slinky, because in the presence of the holiness of God he discovers the depth of his sinfulness.

I think back to my first encounter with the holiness of God. That moment was unforgettable. It was winter of freshman year, and for the first time in my life, I met God. That's when I became a Christian. And my becoming a Christian was an encounter with the holiness of God. I had come to realize how dirty and sinful I was before a holy God. Staring the sheer breath and depth of my sin was horrifying, but even more so was facing the holiness of God. How could God forgive such sins? How could He make someone so dirty so clean? I'll never forget that season of my life. I realized that I was far worse than I thought I was.

Encountering God and his holiness resulting in the horrific realization that we are sinners, is a good thing. There can be no experience more honest, more important, more cathartic, than an experience like that. Why? Because when we encounter this, when you and I experience the holiness of God and the sinfulness of our souls, God sends a seraphim to the altar to grasp a hot coal and he takes it to our lips and cleanses us from all our sins. In other words, you and I can experience the forgiveness that can only be had by believing in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the one who took upon himself the punishment for all of our sins.

If you've never experienced the forgiveness of Jesus you can today. If you will humble yourself, open your heart, confess your sins, and receive his forgiveness.

God's purpose in revealing his holiness is not only to forgive and cleanse, but his purpose is also to call, to commission, to send.

Immediately after Isaiah's encounter with the holiness of God what does God say? He invites us to be a part of his plan. This is not just true with prophets and pastors and missionaries, but with all who are forgiven by God. The mother, the businessman, the student. To every single one of us, God asks the same question. "Whom shall I send?"

And there can be only one answer. "Here am I. Send me!"

J.I. Packer says in his classic book "Knowing God" that 1. Those who know God have great energy for God. 2. Those who know God have great thoughts of God. 3. Those who know God show great boldness for God. And 4. Those who know God have great contentment in God. that knows who know God do great things for God.

That's the fruit of those who have encountered the holiness of God. Friends, God is also asking you the same question. Whom shall I send? To your family, to your place of work, to your neighborhood, to the other side of the world. Who will go for me?

People of God, encountering the holiness of God is a dangerous thing. We are dealing with stuff of which we do not know. We are dealing with God. And when as God deals with us, he cleanses us and then he commissions us. You and I must respond as Isaiah responded, "Here am I. Send me."

