

Holy, Holy, Holy Is the LORD Almighty

Isaiah 6:1-8 (NIV84)

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!"

While I was in Wisconsin, one of our friends introduced us to a game called, "Kings of Israel." The object of the game - I kid you not - is to remove sin and idols from the ancient northern nation of Israel. In other words, you are going to make them holy by preaching to them the Word of God. Yeah, it's probably a game appreciated only by a select few, most likely called workers. Each turn is spent under the reign of a different king of Israel starting with Saul going all the way to Hoshea, Israel's last king before being destroyed in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians. Each king is color coded - gold for good, red for bad. Once you get past Kings Saul, David, Solomon, it's pretty much all red, all bad kings. I bring this up because it reminded me how unworthy so many kings of Israel had been, kings that God allowed to have power and authority over his people, even when they didn't follow him.

King Uzziah, however, was one of the good kings. He was described as one who had done right in the eyes of the LORD. Isaiah should know; he was the king's recorder. Uzziah enjoyed a time of prosperity and expansion for Judah. But as God gave him victories and conquests, his pride grew to arrogance.

Uzziah entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense. Doesn't seem like a big deal until you realize that God had commanded that only the priests would enter the temple to do this. Uzziah was, of course, not a priest. In fact, 80 priests confronted Uzziah in the temple. They calmly explained that it was not right for him to do this, that Uzziah was being unfaithful to God and would not be honored if he went through with his plan. Uzziah became angry and raged at the priests. In an instant form of punishment, God made leprosy break out on the king's forehead. Uzziah was unclean. He had to be separated not just from the temple, but from the palace and even from Jerusalem. The unworthy king had to live in a separate house outside of Jerusalem for the rest of his life.

Uzziah thought that as the king of Judah he had every right to be in the temple of the LORD and offer incense in spite of God's commands. And Uzziah was by and large a good king. He was faithful. He followed the LORD. He gave credit to God for his victories. Yet, even as good as he was, he could not be before the LORD in his temple without consequence. Even good kings are unworthy to be in the presence of the LORD Almighty.

How many times have we been taught and told that we cannot measure our worth before the LORD Almighty by comparing ourselves to others? Yet, we keep doing it. We keep looking to the right and to the left, seeing what other people are doing, and then gauging how well I am doing spiritually. I don't do things like that guy over there. I go to church more than they do. I give more of my time or more of my money than those families. I study the Bible more than they do. When we look to the left and to the right, comparing ourselves with other sinners, it's pretty easy to feel good about ourselves, to feel like we are people worthy of the LORD Almighty.

I'm sure people looked at Isaiah and thought the same things. Here is an upright and faithful believer, a good guy. Isaiah himself maybe looked around too and thought that he was doing pretty okay, especially when compared to all their distant relatives of those wicked northern tribes of Israel. But then it all changed. The Lord gave Isaiah a vision: "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. 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.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke." (verses 1-4)

Isaiah's immediate reaction to this vision: "I am ruined!" All his perceived worthiness when measuring himself to other people went out the window. Isaiah no longer thinks he is chums with God, worthy to stand in his presence like it's no big deal. No, the overriding

attribute of the LORD in this vision is holy. Holy, holy, holy. Holy three times. Holies of holies, the absolute most holy, Holy for each person of the Triune God – Holy is the Father, Holy is the Son, Holy is the Spirit. The three in one Lord Almighty is unique, pure, without sin – holy. Looking at the most holy being, Isaiah is instantly brought to ruin. His worth is completely shattered looking up at the LORD Almighty.

When you look left and right and compare yourself to other people, other sinners like you, you can make yourself feel better that you don't make necessarily the same mistakes or commit the same sins. But when you look up and come face to face with someone who is perfect, you are forced to reflect on why you are not like them. And you can react in one of two ways: either find a way to bring them down to your level or try to get to their level. You can search and find the things wrong with the person if you look long and hard enough. You watch their every move, waiting for them to slip. Or, you can work on improving yourself. You can do more and more, match their good deeds and outweigh them and elevate yourself to being better than them.

But with God, you can't. He stands up to every test. He is perfect, pure, holy, holy, holy. The only way I can lower him is by my reasoning, which is imperfect. Then finally I have to admit with Isaiah, "I am ruined! 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." (verse 5)

It's interesting that Isaiah recognizes his unworthiness by what comes from his lips. Who of us can claim any different than Isaiah? Struggle as we do to live according to God's will, to obey his commands, yet words launch from our lips – words to insult, to wound, to defraud, to demean, to lie, to gossip, to put down so that I can lift myself up. Think back on this morning or yesterday or the past week. How many fights have you provoked with the words coming off of your lips? How many complaints, how many unkind things, how many growls of frustration, how many statements were made to make someone feel stupid? A new mark that shows me how unclean my lips are is when I become offended at what my kids say. Most of the time I can trace the root of where they heard things like that, and it's from me.

As we look up to the one who committed no sin, who had done no violence, nor was any deceit found in his mouth (Isaiah 53:9), we come to the same place as Isaiah. As I stand before the Holy, Holy, Holy Lord Almighty, I am ruined. I am a person of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips. I have no chance of salvation measuring myself to the holiest of holy, to the Triune God. I am unworthy to be in his presence.

Probably cowering to the ground in misery over his sin, the Holy, Holy, Holy LORD Almighty sends one of his seraphs, an angel, to Isaiah. The seraph carries with him a live coal in his hand. He takes it and touches Isaiah's mouth and says these words, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (verse 7)

The Holy, Holy, Holy LORD Almighty does the same for us. Although he does not use a coal, he purifies us. The Holy Spirit did this in our baptisms as we were born again, spiritually speaking, of water and the Spirit. The Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Almighty gave us a new spirit to call him "Father." The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children because of baptism, because he has sent the Redeemer, God the Son, Jesus Christ, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have made us holy and he renews us in that holiness with his supper. I come to the table ruined and unclean, but God the Son's body has been given for me, his blood shed for me for the taking away of my guilt and the atoning of my sin. We are cleansed by his Word through this eating and drinking. We are no longer ruined, but saved. The Holy, Holy, Holy LORD Almighty makes us worthy to be in his presence.

Having his guilt taken away and his sin atoned for, Isaiah jumps at the chance to serve the LORD. "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!'" (verse 8) You and I have been made holy by the Holy, Holy, Holy LORD Almighty and worthy to be in his presence. God is calling you to action – new members and longtime members. How will you now answer the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

Maybe you have the desire to go into the public ministry and be a pastor or a teacher or a staff minister. Maybe you want to be a missionary. It's never too late to do this. If you don't want to go through all that training and school, maybe you want to volunteer your time for WELS Kingdom Workers. With Kingdom Workers you go to different places in the country and do mission work just as a Christian. You can sign up to go door to door with Truth in Love Ministry in areas like Provo. You can give your time to be a part of Builders for Christ and swing a hammer and use your handyman skills to help build a church for other brothers and sisters in Christ.

If you don't want to leave our congregation, then consider talking to Sue about helping with Vacation Bible School. Consider teaching Sunday School. Come sit in on our Outreach Committee meetings here once a month and give your input and efforts as to how we can continue reaching out to people in our community. Ask me if you want to go with on a shut-in or evangelism call.

And if you don't have the time for those things, you can tell the love of Jesus to those around you – your family, your friends. Your children are probably your best mission field. If those are not in the cards for you, you can do two other powerful things. You can

support those who do the mission and evangelism work. You can give offerings which support missions both here in Utah and as a part of our national church body, the WELS, as we send a portion of our offerings off to start new missions in the US and around the world. You can pray that the gospel message we preach work in the hearts of the people we reach. Encourage your pastor with prayer and with God's Word. He needs it.

The Holy, Holy, Holy LORD Almighty has taken away your guilt. He has atoned for your sin. You are no longer ruined. You are worthy to stand in his presence. Now the voice of the LORD is calling for you, "Who will go for us?" May we answer in our various ways, "Here am I. Send me! Send me!" Amen.

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