

# The Majestic Holiness of Our God – Isaiah 6

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## Introduction

Many of us have been Christians for a long time. This is good. However, one danger in being a Christian for so long is that we can lose our wonder over God, forgetting the magnitude of who He really is and the enormity of what He has done. And we can become almost too comfortable with God, losing that sense of reverent fear. We all know the routine and the familiar Christian terms and activities. What we often need is a restoration of our sense of awe.

This may be especially true concerning this next attribute of God – His holiness. The goal in considering God's holiness is to stir up our understanding of our God which leads to renewed worship and service to Him.

Now as we begin it is important to note that like many themes in the Bible (redemption being a primary one), the concept of holiness unfolds progressively as we move left to right in our bibles. God's holiness is not expressly mentioned until Exodus 3 which beginning in verse 1 reads:

*Exodus 3:1-6*

*Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

The ground was holy because God was there. Man must now pay attention. And in Exodus 15 after the Israelites were delivered in the water from the Egyptians, Moses and the people sing a song. Verse 11 says:

*"Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?  
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*

The psalms are full of references to God's holiness. The theme is picking up momentum and as an attribute of God, is vital to understanding Him and His work in creation.

This brings us to our text today which is one of the most sobering sections of Scripture. For in it, God's awesome holiness is revealed. We begin reading in verse 1 of chapter six:

## A Glorious Vision

*In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”*

*4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.*

### ***The Context (6:1a)***

Isaiah the soon to be prophet is the one speaking here. His prophetic ministry spanned the reign of four kings in Judah; Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isa 1:1). However, his ministry began at the tail end of King Uzziah’s reign which had lasted for fifty-two years. Both accounts of his reign (2 Kings 15, 2 Chronicles 26) commended him as a ruler who *“did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.”* Uzziah sought God and was instructed by Zechariah who taught him the fear of the Lord. And as long as the king pursued God, *“God made him prosper”* (2 Chron 26:5). Uzziah achieved success against Israel’s enemies, built a strong military and defense systems, and prospered their economy. Uzziah’s reign was a period of national prosperity.

But the Bible records that when Uzziah became strong, he grew proud and unfaithful, which led to his destruction. His pride climaxed with an incident in the temple where the king attempted to take the God ordained role of the priests and burn incense. The priests led by Azariah confronted Uzziah and warned him to change his mind. But the king only grew angry and at that moment, the Lord struck him with leprosy which lasted the final ten years of his life. And over those ten years, Uzziah was excluded from the house of the Lord and had to watch his son govern the people over his last days – all because the Lord struck him with leprosy for exalting himself to be God. He fouled out!

Now although over the period of Uzziah’s reign, the people enjoyed prosperity, not all was well with their spiritual condition. 2 Kings 15 records that despite the king doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord, *“the high places were not taken away”* and the people, *“still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places”* (2 Kings 15:4). Spiritual apostasy reigned along with King Uzziah. And when you read the five chapters of Isaiah leading up to our text, you see the people described as “proud” and “haughty” and “rebellious”. They along with the king had exalted themselves. God’s assessment of their condition was made clear in Isaiah 1:4, *“Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.”*

So in this year that King Uzziah died, the people (Isaiah included), needed a new vision of who is to truly be exalted. The people needed to be jolted from their comfort and ease to see clearly the danger they were in.

### ***The Lord (6:1b)***

The contrast in verse one is striking; King Uzziah, the proud but fleeting earthly king had left his throne in death but the true King was firmly seated on His throne. *“High and lifted up”* was the Lord where He had always been.

Isaiah describes that *“the train of His robe filled the temple”*. This is hard for us to picture in our minds but that was not Isaiah’s point. In ancient times, the length or size of the king’s robe signified his power and greatness – the larger and longer the train, the greater the king. Isaiah is telling us the Lord is the greatest King – the King of kings. There is no other!

### ***The Seraphim (6:2-4)***

So the Lord is seated upon His throne, high and lifted up – the King. And above Him stood the seraphim. They are awesome celestial beings. They bear human features with faces, feet, voices, and hands. And each have three pairs of wings. The first pair veiled their faces to protect them from the brilliance of God’s holiness and glory – God designed them so they could serve Him at the throne. The second pair covered their feet which seems to signify a holy reverence for God.

The third pair of wings allowed the seraphim to serve Him; flying around the Lord and His throne and in this scene, communicate with Isaiah.

And without ceasing the seraphim called to one another proclaiming,

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”*

Most importantly the seraphim were created to proclaim to the universe and all creatures the majestic holiness of God. *“Holy, holy, holy”* one called to another. Notice the solemn repetition of three – it is not often we see 3’s in the Bible much less concerning an attribute of God. God has many attributes but none are spoken of in 3’s. The Bible does not say “gracious, gracious, gracious” or “merciful, merciful, merciful” is the Lord. No, only *“holy, holy, holy”*.

### **What is Holiness?**

So what does it mean to be holy? Being holy is to be entirely free from moral evil – it is absolute moral perfection. Holiness describes a separation from anything sinful, impure, or morally imperfect. God is holy – not because He perfectly meets the standard but because He is the standard.<sup>1</sup> “He only is independently, infinitely, and immutably holy”.<sup>2</sup> The sum of all moral excellence is found in God. He is absolute purity. 1 John 1:5 says, “*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*”

### **The Nature of God’s Holiness**

And His holiness is the very excellency of the divine nature. Again, Exodus 15:11 says:

*“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?  
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*

And holiness is God’s beauty. It gives all of God’s attributes beauty – a glorious lustre. Psalm 27:4 speaks of the beauty of the Lord and Psalm 110:3 of the beauty of holiness. Holiness is the attribute of God which if tarnished to any degree, would cause His other attributes to lose honor. The holy purity of God brings splendor to everything about Him. For instance, God can be described as possessing holy justice, holy wisdom, having holy power, and on and on. And Psalm 103:1 says,

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name!*

His very name is holy.

All of this is probably not new to you. However, have you considered that the word holy means to be “well” or “whole”? Whatever is holy is healthy. Its opposite, evil, is unhealthy - a moral sickness that must end ultimately in death.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore God is working to eradicate the sickness of evil from His universe. He hates evil and will not stop working until it is gone. This is no different than a parent wanting to stamp out childhood cancer in his or her child – complete eradication is the goal and nothing else. His wrath is an expression of His holiness and when His judgment occurs, God is acting to preserve this world, His people, and His church.

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1961), p. 176

<sup>2</sup> A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1975), p. 41

<sup>3</sup> Tozer, p. 176

Therefore God cannot tolerate evil in any form or to any degree. In fact, He cannot even look at evil. Habakkuk 1:13 says, *“You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong..”*

And since God is absolutely holy, He cannot possibly approve of any evil done by another. Rather He hates it perfectly else it would not be a perfect holiness. He must hate it with an intensity that never ceases. He must hate evil and sin everywhere not just in certain places. And He can never stop hating evil and sin because if He did, He would stop loving holiness.

Since God is so holy He cannot encourage sin in anyone (James 1:13) which means he does not command any unrighteousness or make it necessary for man to have to sin under any circumstance.

People say that God can do everything. That is not true. God cannot do anything that denies His character. So God can only hate sin and evil else He would less than absolutely holy.

### **God's Holiness Demonstrated**

Even without the Scriptures, there is an understanding of a Being who is in charge of the universe. Whether expressed or not, every man and woman carries a deep dread of this Being – a sense of being unworthy and accountable to it – a day of reckoning is coming. Coupled with the fact that the identity of this Being is vague and undefined, mankind creates a myriad of gods – gods of their imagination. They worship and bow down to them in a vain hope of pleasing this Being (and live lives unaccountable to the real God). There can even be an unbiblical obsession with doing so.

But the Scriptures really show us God's holiness. First, He created man perfectly righteous. We see this in the garden with Adam and Eve. Secondly, we see his righteousness in His laws and commands. They are perfect in purity.

We also see God's righteousness in how he deals with sin. The many judgments seen in the Scriptures are brought about by God's holy anger over sin and evil. We see His holy anger in how he judged the various nations who occupied the land of Canaan before his people Israel arrived. We see how He punished nation Israel in the wilderness over the course of the nation's history.

### **The Plight of Unholy Man**

And most clearly, we see God's holiness revealed in justice upon sinners. Men are born sinners and God can only judge them because He is holy and they are not. By default, they are children of wrath when born. He has no relationship with them unless something changes. Either He relaxes His holy standard, which we have already seen is impossible, or man becomes perfectly holy which the Scriptures tell us is equally impossible – man is incapable because of his sin nature.

And we see the holiness of God most vividly in the life of Jesus Christ. Turn with me to Luke 5:1 where we read:

*On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*

There is much to say here but see this; Jesus' Word, miraculous command, and very presence filled Peter with great fear. Jesus did not have to say, "I am holy". It was obvious. Peter was painfully and ashamedly aware of Jesus perfect holiness and his own lack of holiness. His only response is to tell God to go away. I cannot be in your presence Lord!

Man is separated from God. But man is not merely a victim finding himself isolated from the Divine. He is actively opposed to the holiness of God.

Man naturally despises God's holiness and opposes it at every turn. We see this expressed everywhere in our culture. And the message is no different than that of the demons to Jesus in Matthew 8:29 who cried out, "*What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come to torment us before our time?*"

And as Romans 1:32 says concerning the world's unholy and unrighteous deeds, "*they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*"

Furthermore, man, even religious man, despises God's holiness when he:

- Over time constructs a multitude of gods shaping the one true God into their image
- Blames God for his own sin
- Studies the Word of God in order to twist it to obscure his own sin

- Prays shamelessly to God in order to gain what he wants for his own ungodly passions (James 4:3) and for his evil plans to succeed.
- Scoffs at those who are pursuing Christ in their hearts and lives
- Confidently approaches God in prayer, in the reading of His Word, and in worship yet his life is a contradiction – living a double life. Are you resisting the world at every turn or loving it? A holy God requires holy worship.<sup>4</sup>
- Charges God that His commands are too strict – He is essentially unfair
- Tries to do far beyond what God requires in order to gain holy merit with Him; extreme denial of their bodies, legalism, etc.

There is no span as great as the distance between unholy man and a holy God. And the two cannot co-exist in God's universe – remember God is working to wipe out the evil and sin which oppose His holiness. God hates unholiness in any form. Therefore, sin must be judged. God's holiness must be satisfied by someone – a mediator between God and man must come forward. Unholy man cannot do it and is in trouble. Hebrews 10:31 says, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* And in Hebrews 12:29 says, *"our God is a consuming fire."*

### ***A Distressed Response (6:5)***

And as he saw the Lord high and lifted up, the seraphim all around Him describing God as *"holy, holy, holy"*, and feeling the heavenly temple shake, Isaiah's eyes were opened. He saw God's utter holiness and his utter lack of holiness. He cries out in 6:5...

*5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"*

These are the first words Isaiah speaks in the book and the soon-to-be prophet speaks against himself. Isaiah sees he is doomed – lost before a holy God. He sees the depth of his sin and the sins of his people. His eyes have been opened to where he can truly assess where he stands in relation to God. And the distance is infinite.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Charnock, *Discourses Upon The Existence and Attributes of God Vol II*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1979), p. 176

All of the self-justifications, the blame shifting, and the dumbing down of God's holy standard vanish when a person sees what Isaiah saw. What a terrifying moment...

But what a moment of sweet grace for in that moment Isaiah expresses to God accurate truth and by what follow is a humble, contrite, and repentant spirit. It is the path to reconciling with a holy God. If not given such vision, Isaiah would have remained in his sin and lost forever. He has seen the King!

Praying for people that their eyes might be opened to the truth of the gospel is so important. If they do not gain spiritual eyes, there is no hope for them before God. And only He can open blind eyes.

And when eyes are opened and a repentant response is made, we know what God will do. He runs immediately to the repentant sinner and takes them in. Just like the prodigal's father who ran to his son to receive him back, God runs to the sinner and welcomes the saint.

### ***Atonement Made (6:6-7)***

We read on in verse 6..

*6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."*

God redeems Isaiah. He cleanses him, removing his guilt and paying for His sins. By the sacrifice from the altar, atonement for Isaiah's sin is sufficient and salvation immediate.

Wiersbe writes, *"If this scene would have been on earth, the coals would have come from the brazen altar where sacrificial blood had been shed, or perhaps from the censer of the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12). Isaiah's cleansing came by blood and fire, and it was verified by the Word of the Lord."*<sup>5</sup>

So unclean lips coming from an unclean heart have been touched with the burning coals of a sacrifice for sin. Lips that would now be used for prophetic service to God.

### ***A Prophetic Call (6:8-13)***

We read on...

*8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." 9 And he said, "Go, and say to this people:*

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<sup>5</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary / Prophets* (Colorado Springs, Cook Communications Ministries, 2002), p. 18

*“Keep on hearing, but do not understand;  
 keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’  
 10 Make the heart of this people dull,  
     and their ears heavy,  
     and blind their eyes;  
 lest they see with their eyes,  
     and hear with their ears,  
 and understand with their hearts,  
     and turn and be healed.”  
 11 Then I said, “How long, O Lord?”  
 And he said:  
 “Until cities lie waste  
     without inhabitant,  
 and houses without people,  
     and the land is a desolate waste,  
 12 and the Lord removes people far away,  
     and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.  
 13 And though a tenth remain in it,  
     it will be burned again,  
 like a terebinth or an oak,  
     whose stump remains  
     when it is felled.”  
 The holy seed is its stump.*

When a man or woman sees the glorious holiness of the Lord and is redeemed and set apart by Him, he or she eagerly says, “yes” when God calls. The response is not “yes, if”. Such was the case with Isaiah. When he heard the call for a prophet, He immediately just says “yes” without asking what the assignment was.

Maybe some of you are reading this and thinking perhaps Isaiah should have gotten an explanation of the assignment first! What kind of prophetic ministry was this? God tells Isaiah go tell this people to keep on hearing what you say but do not understand and keep on seeing but do not perceive. Isaiah was directed to undertake a ministry of hardening. Oh, God would leave a remnant of believers in the land but for the most part, the people would make their rejection of God permanent. God in effect said to Israel, you want to remain in unbelief and rebellion then I am getting out of the way and letting you pursue what you want.

And for how long Lord, Isaiah asks? A few months or a year? No, for the rest of your life – a prophecy that would be completely fulfilled when the holy seed, Jesus, would come.

### **The Holy Son of God**

John gives us more insight into this Isaiah passage as he references it in the gospel of John...John 12:36-43:

*When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. 37 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, 38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

*“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*

*39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,*

*40 “He has blinded their eyes  
and hardened their heart,  
lest they see with their eyes,  
and understand with their heart, and turn,  
and I would heal them.”*

*41 Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. 42 Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*

700+ years later, the crowd in Jerusalem surrounding Jesus does not believe who He is or His teaching. Isaiah’s prophecy had been perfectly fulfilled. Do you see the Isaiah 6 referenced here by John?

But do not miss verse 41, *Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.* Isaiah spoke of whose glory? It was that of Jesus Christ. It was Jesus Christ *sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.* The Lord Jesus Christ is our majestic holy God.

Jesus is the “*Holy One*” in Acts 2:27 and 3:14, the “*holy servant*” of the Father in Acts 4:27, and the holy high priest in Hebrews 7:26. Even the demon in Luke 4:34 said when speaking to Jesus, “*I know who you are, the Holy One of God*”.

This is God’s greatest revelation of His holiness. It was in the sending of the Holy One, Jesus Christ to die for and bear the punishment for the unholy. In taking our punishment for sin, God’s holy justice was met

and we could then attain holiness through Jesus' perfect righteousness. The impossible situation for man has been solved. The work of Christ atoned for Isaiah and was why He gloried in Jesus. Jesus is the pure, unblemished, and holy Lamb of God!

### **Reflect and Respond**

Can you see how far you were separated from this holy God?

Or do you see how far today you are separated from a holy God? Hebrews 4 tells you to come and enter His rest while it is still called "Today". Do not harden your heart or presume upon His patience.

If you want to tell people about the holiness of God, then receive the holiness of God first. Isaiah did.

As a Christian, do you realize you represent your holy God in this world and to one another? 1 Peter 1:15-16 tells us

*15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*

And then in 2:9:

*9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

Remember though we are not the primary reason for God's work in creating this world. But rather His primary purpose is to communicate His goodness and grace and to display the beauty and majesty of His holiness – let us make this the reason for our love for Him even above the fact that He is gracious to us. May bringing glory to His holy name be central in your life.

Culture a right and genuine sense of His holiness – else we cannot fully exalt God in our hearts and in our service. By doing so it:

- Keeps us focused on our service to Him and from holding an indifferent attitude towards God.
- Equips us to resist temptation and sin.
- Gives us an ever increasing desire to be conformed to Christ.
- Keeps us thankful and free of a grumbling and complaining spirit
- Enables us under the most fiery trial or the most mundane circumstance, to be content and patient which is pleasing to God

Take comfort in the fact that our holy God will perfect holiness in us (John 17:11)

Expressing God's holiness in our lives gives us assurance that we are His and that He is our holy God.

All praise to the Lord Jesus Christ who sits on His throne, high and lifted up, majestic in holiness for forever and ever!

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