

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 4: Isaiah Sees the Lord and Is Sent -- Isaiah 6:1-13

Some moments split a life into a before and an after. Isaiah had one of those moments, and he never forgot the year it happened. “In the year that King Uzziah died,” he begins, and you can feel the ground shifting under the nation. Uzziah had reigned for half a century. He was the only king most people in Judah had ever known, and now he was gone. The throne in Jerusalem was empty, the future uncertain, the hearts of the people anxious. And it is precisely then, when the earthly throne sits vacant, that Isaiah is shown a throne that is never empty.

“I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” Notice he does not lead with the architecture or the angels. He leads with the Lord. Above the throne stand the seraphim, blazing creatures with six wings, and they are not admiring God or studying Him. They are covering their faces. Even the sinless, burning ones cannot look full into that glory. And they cry to one another the words that have echoed through every age of worship since: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

What does a man do when the door to heaven swings open and he is suddenly standing in the light? Isaiah does not say, “How wonderful.” He says, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips.” The nearer he comes to the holiness of God, the more clearly he sees himself. This is the order Scripture always follows. We do not climb up to a high view of God. He shows Himself, and the height of His holiness measures the depth of our need. But the story does not end with woe. A live coal is taken from the altar, laid against his guilty lips, and a voice declares, “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

Then, and only then, comes the question that hangs over this whole lesson: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” A cleansed man can answer that question. A man still crushed under his guilt cannot. But Isaiah, forgiven and made clean by God’s own gift, finds his voice: “Here am I! Send me.” Before we ever talk about being sent, we have to be undone by holiness and lifted by grace. So let us walk into the throne room with Isaiah, and let the One who is high and lifted up do His work in us.

Group Discussion: Isaiah’s first response to seeing God was not comfort but conviction: “Woe is me, I am ruined.” Why do you think a clear vision of God’s holiness produces that reaction, and why is it actually a healthy and necessary thing? Discuss what is missing in a faith that never feels any of that weight.

Personal Reflection: Isaiah was cleansed before he was commissioned, and only then could he say, “Here am I, send me.” Where in your own life are you trying to serve God, or struggling to, without first letting Him deal with your sin and assure you of His forgiveness? What would change if you started there?

Read Isaiah 6:1-13

Study Questions

1. Isaiah 6:1–4 shows the Lord “high and lifted up” while the seraphim cry “Holy, holy, holy.” What do these verses teach us about the holiness and majesty of God, and why does it matter that even sinless angels cover their faces in His presence? Support your answer from the text.
2. Isaiah saw the empty earthly throne (Uzziah had died) and then saw the throne of God that is never empty. When an earthly source of security is removed from your life, where does your mind go first? How might fixing your eyes on God’s unshaken throne steady you?
3. When Isaiah saw the Lord, he cried, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (6:5). What does this teach us about how the holiness of God exposes our sin, and why is genuine conviction of sin a necessary part of coming to God? Use the verse in your answer.
4. Isaiah confessed not only his own unclean lips but that he dwelt “in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” How aware are you of the sin in your own speech, and how easy is it to excuse it because everyone around you talks the same way? Name one specific area where you sense God’s conviction.
5. In Isaiah 6:6–7 a seraph takes a burning coal from the altar, touches Isaiah’s lips, and says, “Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” What does this teach about the source of cleansing from sin (who acts, and on what basis), and how does this point forward to the atonement we have in Christ? Support your answer from the text and from Hebrews 9:13–14.

6. Isaiah did not cleanse himself; the coal was brought to him from the altar. Be honest: do you ever try to “clean yourself up” before you feel you can approach God, rather than receiving His cleansing as a gift? How does this passage confront that habit?
7. Only after Isaiah was cleansed did God ask, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” and Isaiah answered, “Here am I! Send me” (6:8). What does the order of these events (cleansing first, then commission) teach us about service to God, and what does Isaiah’s answer reveal about willing surrender? Support your answer from the verses.
8. God’s call went out as a real invitation: “Whom shall I send?” Isaiah said yes. When you sense God prompting you toward a task, a conversation, or a sacrifice, what tends to make you hesitate? What would “Here am I, send me” look like in your life this week?
9. Isaiah 6:9–13 gives Isaiah a hard commission: to preach a word that would harden many hearts (“keep on hearing, but do not understand”), yet a “holy seed” remains in the stump of the felled tree. Explain how the same word of God can both save and harden depending on the hearer’s response, why this does NOT mean God arbitrarily condemns people who genuinely want to be saved, and how the surviving “holy seed” points to the faithful remnant and ultimately to Christ. Support your answer from the text and from John 12:39–41 and 2 Corinthians 2:15–16.
10. John 12:41 tells us that when Isaiah saw this vision, “he saw [Christ’s] glory and spoke of him.” Having seen the holiness of God, the conviction of sin, and the gift of atonement, name one specific way you will let Jesus form you, whether in how you worship, how you confess sin, or how you answer when He calls you to go.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: John 12:37-41, John tells us Isaiah saw Christ's glory and explains the hardening of unbelief; Revelation 4:6-11, the living creatures around the throne cry the same "Holy, holy, holy" Isaiah heard; Hebrews 9:13-14, the blood of Christ cleanses the conscience far beyond what any altar coal could picture; Romans 11:1-5, the surviving remnant "chosen by grace" as the holy seed Isaiah saw in the stump

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