

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Sept. 12: Worship begins with a glimpse of God's holiness_90604

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Worship begins with a glimpse of God's holiness

Isaiah 6:1-13

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Of all the attributes of God, holiness is the one that seems to take center stage. In Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah was given a vision of God and his holiness. This week's lesson will show how Isaiah responded to God's holiness.

The dictionary suggests these definitions for holiness: "to divide," "to mark off" and "to set apart from all else." The word "holy" has come to mean "spiritually pure, sacred, sinless."

A.W. Tozer describes God's holiness in this manner: "We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable,

incomprehensible and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God's power and admire his wisdom, but his holiness he cannot even imagine."

Isaiah saw the Lord

In Uzziah's 52-year reign, many people were away from the Lord and involved in sin; therefore, Isaiah was living in a critical time in history. Although Isaiah was already a prophet, he was being called to a more difficult task. Isaiah's mission came in the form of a vision directly from God.



Isaiah 6:1-4 records the greatest vision anyone can ever have—to see the Lord! Isaiah saw God on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. At God's side were seraphs. The seraphs' task was to give glory to the Lord. The seraphs praise with a threefold repetition of the word holy. Repeating a word three times for emphasis is common in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 22:29; Ezekiel 21:27). God is holy, holy, holy, and no one else is close to being like him. God was the central object of all praise.

This image of God is designed to point us to God's majesty, which should move us to reverence and awe. Worship begins when we catch a glimpse of God's holiness. Worship begins when we stop and grasp the awe, wonder, power and sacredness of God.

Isaiah saw himself

After this incredible glimpse of God, Isaiah saw himself as he really was. He was convicted of his sinfulness. He no longer felt worthy. Isaiah cried out: "Woe to me! I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among people of unclean lips."

As Isaiah looked at his life in light of God's holiness, he was most conscious of his unclean lips. Isaiah was a prophet of God. Isaiah's role was to represent God to the people. The avenue for this representation was by mouth. His lips were used by God and for God, yet Isaiah saw his lips as sinful. When Isaiah stood in the presence of the living God, he became aware of his sinfulness, his arrogance and his self-righteousness.

Isaiah saw God's cleansing power

When Isaiah realized his sin, the cleansing began. The seraph took a live coal off of the altar with tongs, flew over and touched Isaiah's lips. The live coal was not intended to hurt but to heal. The coal was a symbol of purification and cleansing. Matthew Henry said, "The seraph being kindled with a divine fire put a new life into the prophet that fired his soul with a zealous love for God."

Isaiah saw his mission

God is now looking for a messenger. Isaiah, who has been transformed by grace and made alive by the mercy of God, says: "Here am I. Send me!" Isaiah's encounter with the holiness of God enabled him to respond to God's call. Isaiah understands a nation of people are in desperate need of the same cleansing he has just received. Isaiah was willing to commit his life to God's service.

A modern-day insight

How do we respond to the holiness of God? With awe? With reverence? Annie Dillard gives this enlightening observation: “Why do people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.”

Dillard is reminding us we serve a holy, powerful God who needs to be sought after with reverence and awe. God is holy, and his holiness motivates people to respond by confessing sin and serving him with all their hearts.

Discussion questions

- ◆ Can you think of a time when you had an awesome spiritual experience?
- ◆ How can you and I effectively reflect God's holiness in the world?
- ◆ What is God calling you to do this week? How are you going to respond to God's call?

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