

A vision of God

Isaiah 6:1-4

If you're just joining us, we've been in a study walking through the gospel of Matthew, and we are going to press pause of that for a focused time of preparing ourselves for Christmas. It's what Christians have historically called the season of Advent, the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. We will resume Matthew in the new year.

And I'm really excited about this series, and no it's not just because we get to take a break from Holy Spirit pounding us in Matthew. That's a joke, we love the Holy Spirit and pray we experience the same activity of the Spirit this morning and through advent.

What we are going to do in advent is anchor ourselves in Isaiah 6:1-8 with a different emphasis each week. You could think of it as a 4-week meditation on this text, turning it 4 ways: God, man, Christ, response. This thematic flow naturally arises from our text. God reveals Himself to Isaiah. Isaiah becomes aware of man's condition before God. Christ takes away Isaiah's sin, and finally he's sent out on mission.

Our objective this morning is to look at this text emphasizing the God piece. A.W. Tozer once said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Would you agree? Is it really that important to think rightly about God? It certainly is a challenge for us. The majority of voices that we hear, from without or from within, are not telling us to think about God, much less think rightly about Him. This takes work, and more importantly, this takes revelation. We need God to reveal Himself to us.

And how relevant this is for us doing the Christmas season when chaos and busyness and noise is at an all-time high. Christmas was not meant to leave us exhausted and depleted. It was meant to leave us refreshed and rejoicing. It's not supposed to be dizzying and disorienting, it's supposed to be clarifying and stabilizing. We come in here this morning with all different stories, depression, anxiety, joy, we all need to see God.

Isaiah the prophet was in a similar position, and before he could make sense of the world, understand himself, or have purpose in life, he needed to see God, and that he does, and gives us the play by play.

6:1 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.

Certainly not exhaustive but from Isaiah 6 We are going to look at God's kingship, supremacy, and holiness. Simple goal, impossible apart from God's help. Let's pray.

1. The Kingship of God

We are around 740 BC and because of their own wickedness and rebellion, things are dark and getting darker for the people of God. 5:30, "if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds."

Uzziah their king has died, and the nations surrounding Judah are mightier than ever. So you've got this double problem of this inward enemy of spiritual decay and an outward enemy of surrounding nations. Into this darkness getting darker, God shows up to Isaiah...

6:1 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.

The first thing the reader is led to see about God, what is this God like? He's compared to a king. The earthly king Uzziah goes down, and there's another, sitting on his throne. Kings sit on thrones. And of course, v.5, my eyes have seen "the King." There's no mistake that God is trying to communicate and emphasizing his kingly office here to Isaiah.

We lose a little bit of the imagery of kings as Americans in the 21st century. I looked and saw the president in the heavenly oval office just doesn't have the same ring to it. But thanks to Braveheart we still get a little taste of it. Suffice it to say that the king is the most important person in a kingdom. The king was the protector, provider, savior, ruler, law-giver and judge, peace keeper, and warrior in chief on behalf of the people. This sets the stage for the type of relationship God has with His people and the various functions.

But because someone is king doesn't mean they are qualified or capable of discharging their kingly duties. Uzziah grew proud and complacent. Ahaz to follow would be weak and wicked. Although being king does set our frame of reference to function, it doesn't guarantee anything for the people.

Is this king fit to discharge faithfully what it means to be king? That all depends. First, it depends upon power.

2. The Supremacy of God

6:1 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.

God is pleased to reveal to Isaiah in this vision his position as king, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. We see here The supremacy of God. The Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up... **44:6-8, "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."**

not only are there no equals, but there are no rivals. None can contend with our God. His power and position is so far above the next creature that no creature is comparatively any closer to God than the others, all are infinitely below Him. One commentator insightfully brought out, if all the armies of heaven and earth united to attack God, it would cause him no uneasiness. And in fact in psalm 2 when the nations are coming together, it's recorded that God laughs.

14:26-27, "This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?"

How high and how powerful is your conception of God this morning?

As we consider God's place of rule, here is our rub with the divine. Listen to A.W. Pink's commentary. "The god of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Scripture than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The "god" who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday School, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called bible conferences is the figment of human imagination, an invention of overly emotional sentimentality. The heathen outside of the pale of Christendom form gods out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a god out of their own carnal mind. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A god whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits nought but contempt."

Oh for the grace for us to get biblical eyes to see God on his throne, reigning, high and lifted up. May we long for and pray to see God as the Bible portrays him, not after our own making. Luther once said to an opposing scholar, Erasmus, “Your thoughts of God are too human.” Is that not us, projecting our own man made opinions onto God--and we weaken his power, it doesn't strengthen.

42:8, “I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.”

A discussion on God's supremacy must matter of fact also deal with God's sovereignty. The two couldn't be related any more closely. Supremacy describes the position in relationship to others,, sovereignty describes the actions. When a supreme being acts, He acts sovereignly. Sovereignty is the working of Supremacy.

The Scriptures are unashamed of God's sovereignty. We see a powerful articulation of it later in Isaiah, 44:24, “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish,

One of God's favorite strategies to encourage faith in His doubting people, when enemies within or without seem big, is to point to His power in creation. God is saying, don't think I'm not good on my word, remember, I formed people and planets, and I didn't call Michelangelo or Home Depot, I just did it. I spread out the earth by myself.

He didn't create something that now has a life of it's own, and God's just hoping it's going to go well. No, from protons to people, everything moves according to the will of God.

Who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited,’ and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins’; who says to the deep, ‘Be dry; I will dry up your rivers’; who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’” -Isaiah 44:24-28 (Isaiah 200 years before)

This is crazy what's going on here. We saw this in our study in Ezra. What's coming down the tracks for the people of God is not pretty... it's exile. Jerusalem, the city of God, the temple, His dwelling place, that's all getting demolished. And as a people, they will be taken off to another country and enslaved. There's nothing more horrific than that for an Israelite, and nothing to tempt you more to distrust God. And here you have Isaiah, 200 years before it happens, saying, Cyrus, that great king of Persia... He's mine, and He will fulfill all My purpose.

What does he end up doing? His heart is stirred up and he decides he not only wants to send the Israelites back to where they came from, he wants to fund the building of their temple and city. If you are an unbelieving king, you don't do that. But if God wills, you do. Proverbs 21:1, The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

“There is no attribute of God more comforting to His children than the sovereignty of God. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne.” -Spurgeon

Gods supremacy is not meant to cause panic but to give peace. God is supreme and therefore He has the power as king do what He wants, but there's still something missing. How do we know this king will act for our best interest? Power alone would be terrifying. That brings us to he next part of this revelation,

3. The Holiness of God

Isaiah's vision continues 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!"

If we used king to describe God's relationship with us, and supremacy to describe his position and power, so holiness most perfectly describes His essence.

Here we gain a vision which transports us to another realm, and makes sci-fi look like child's play. This is real. There above God on the throne stood (or some think they are hovering) are the seraphim. It's the only place in Scripture where these creatures are mentioned. Their name is literally, "the burning ones." Imagine a flying ball of fire with six wings. Two of these wings covered his face and two covered his feet... both acts of supreme humility and reverence. As majestic as these creatures are, they could not gaze upon God. The sense is not that so much that they were ashamed or God would destroy them if they did, it's that they apprehended the glory of the holiness of God, and this is their response of humble worship. The same idea is found in covering their feet. With two wings they fly around in worship and obedience.

What does their worship sound like? Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts (God of the armies in heaven).

The choice word of the angels, and of Scripture, and of God's revelation to us, to describe Himself is Holy. The threefold repetition used as emphasis—exceedingly, perfectly holy. "Completely, Totally, Absolutely, the holiest of the holy. God's holiness reveals how separate, different, totally other he is in comparison to all other aspects of the created world. Although the word does not mean sinless, God's holiness means that he is separate from everything that is sinful, utterly removed from the profane world, and glorious in majesty."

Sam Storms puts it this way, "The holiness of God only secondarily refers to His moral purity, His righteousness of character. It primarily points to His infinite otherness. To say that God is holy is to say that He is transcendently separate. Holiness is not one attribute among many. It is not like grace or power or knowledge or wrath. Everything about God is holy. Each attribute partakes of divine holiness."

Jerry Bridges adds, "Holiness is the perfection of all [God's] other attributes. His power is holy power, His mercy is holy mercy, His wisdom is holy wisdom. It is His holiness more than any other attribute that makes Him worthy of our praise."

And so the seraphim continuously release their praise to God. They don't get bored worshipping God. There's every reason to believe the song of the seraphim continues hour after hour, day after day, unceasing worship.

When we gaze upon the King as holy, we are drawn to worship. God's holiness is beautiful to us. We also see His holiness in relation to His faithfulness, love, and moral purity. He is perfectly perfect in righteousness. The King is holy, and nothing draws us more to praise Him and trust Him than this. God's Law Romans says is holy. The fullness of the revelation of God's law is the fullness of the revelation of God. The problem is that holiness also upholds the law, God upholds His holiness and burns against everything that is not holy. Holiness supplies the fullness of judgement on all wickedness.

The problem for us is that we aren't holy. A supreme and holy King is great if you are on His team. If your not, He's to be feared. That's why Isaiah, when he sees God in this way breaks down, "Woe is me, I am lost, a man of unclean lips." Judgement will be swift for all who oppose God. The Scripture tells us that all humanity stands in opposition to God, that we've become rebels and now stand as objects of His wrath.

Man stands condemned before a holy and supreme God. There's nothing we can do to cleanse ourselves and there's nowhere we can run to escape His judgement. There's never been a bigger problem for humanity. Is that a dark picture? It doesn't get any darker. But against this backdrop of judgement the gospel shines like diamonds on a cloth.

And here in is the Christmas story that we celebrate.

The Love of God

God's sovereignty and holiness collide in the Christmas story as the gospel good news to all who would believe. This wasn't something new, it was purposed in the very beginning in the heart of God, and articulated as a promise after Adam and Eve sinned, that one day God would rescue humanity and undo all the affects of the curse, bringing peace again to the earth.

Isaiah picks up the theme, **9:2**, **"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."**

The Christmas miracle is not that a baby was born, but that God was born, that God came to us, that He purposed to save us. He saves us in the person of Jesus. The little baby born in Bethlehem is no ordinary baby, He's the Messiah. In fact, the gospel of John interprets Isaiah 6 to us, that the vision Isaiah had was of the pre-incarnate Jesus. This is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the supreme and holy one who shows up in a manger.

Jl Packer articulates it, *"The Divine Son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as as helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. And there was no disillusion or deception in this: the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality. The more you think about it the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation."*

We marvel at the incarnation, but we marvel because the incarnation is God's rescue plan for us. The Supreme Holy King has come to do war on our behalf, to defeat Satan and deliver us from the kingdom of darkness. The more staggering fact is His means of victory. Jesus would defeat our enemy by dying. His death on the cross was the death blow to death itself. The cosmic king trades his heavenly thrown surrounded by fiery seraphim for nails in his hands and feet and a crown of thorns on his head. The death blow works because He satisfies His own justice for sinners... He pays the penalty for sin, that's our sin we see the supreme holy King paying for.

It wouldn't be long before the Father would vindicate Jesus, three days later he would rise from the grave, conquering all death and sin, and as Ephesians 1 says, therefore, God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Jesus is right back to where He belongs, the supreme and holy One, sitting on His throne. The Lord has come, but the Lord is coming again, and we await His second coming, when He will make all things right. The song of the Seraphim begins with Holy Holy Holy, followed by "the whole earth is filled with your glory." It could be seen two ways because the verb isn't supplied in the song, either a present tense or future. Now the whole earth is filled with your glory, and that certainly is true from Romans, but there's a future tense that might also be accurate, the whole earth will be filled with your glory. this is the prayer of Psalm 72:19, "Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory!" It recognizes that sin has broken the planet. Though God's glory in creation is present, we know the full manifestation of His glory is yet to come.

This is what we await, a new heavens and a new earth completely consumed in the glory of God's holiness. The vision Isaiah had will become our vision. And we won't be saying woe is me, we will be saying praise Jesus. Holy Holy Holy, the whole earth is filled with your glory!