

## **“THE VISION OF IMMANUEL.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Text for the Sermon: Isaiah 6:1-13**

### **Introduction.**

What is the most awe inspiring thing you have ever seen or heard or witnessed?

How about our sanctuary decorated for Advent. We can stand in awe before the Grand Canyon or the Grand Tetons or Banff and Lake Louise. We can listen in awe to the roar of the ocean in a storm or Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. We can be amazed at pictures of the splendor of a galaxy or the aurora borealis. What about the terrifying power of a great flood, a forest fire, a lightning storm, an avalanche, a tornado? Is anything more moving than the birth of a baby?

What have you experienced that knocked you out of your senses?

What Isaiah saw knocked him out of his senses. Encounters with God will do that. There is nothing else in the universe like it. It was a whole body experience.

He saw the Lord high and lifted up.  
He heard the seraphim.  
He felt the foundations shaking.  
He smelled the smoke.  
He trembled in the depths of his soul.  
He felt the burning coals.  
He heard the voice of the Lord.

Are you glad you can only read about this vision? Are you glad this was Isaiah and not you? Are we like the children of Israel when they saw Moses covered in glory as he came down from Mt. Sinai and were afraid to come near him and wanted him to stay between them and God?

*Five visions in one.*

### **The Vision of Holiness, 6:1-4.**

Holiness is a massive truth about God. He is not only holy, but thrice holy, holy in the superlative, holy to the third power. So holy His glory fills the earth, fills the universe.

We cannot comprehend the holiness of God. You can't think of the most holy thing or the most beautiful thing or the most awe inspiring thing and then try to think of that multiplied by a million (A.W. Tozer, *The knowledge of the Holy*, p. 111).

You can't go up the ladder of living beings starting with single cell organisms and work your way up through the animal kingdoms to man and then to angels and archangels and seraphim then take the next step up to God. The distance from a single cell to an angel is a finite distance. The distance from the angel to God is an infinite distance (A.W. Tozer, *The knowledge of the Holy*, p. 76).

We know nothing of the divine holiness. It is utterly other, unapproachable, incomprehensible, unattainable.

Even the perfectly pure and sinless seraphim veiled themselves in the presence of the unapproachable glory of God. God is not just separated from what is sinful and evil, He is separated and above everything in creation. God is utterly set apart and different, in a class all by Himself.

And yet as dreadful as God's holiness is, there is also something thrilling about. The seraphim can't help but respond to it and not just one response but a repetitious response, back and forth, exclaiming and proclaiming God's holiness with great delight. It calls for the deepest praise.

This holiness is tangible, visible in the form of glory that fills the whole earth. All creation is filled with tangible evidence of God, of His nature, His being, His character. All of history is a revelation of His redemptive glory and grace.

The sad reality is most of us are so consumed with our little lives we don't see or notice the glory of God that surrounds us. We won't see it until God's grace gets ahold of us and opens our eyes.

### **A vision of the sinfulness of our souls, 6:5.**

The first vision is breathtaking, the second vision is life-threatening, emotionally violent to the superlative degree. "Woe is me, I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips who has seen the Lord."

In the presence of holiness he feels the depths of his corruption and moral unholiness. To the degree God is perfect and pure, to that same degree he is imperfect and impure. The two are polar opposites, as far as the east is from the west, as far as the heavens are about the earth.

Before a holy God, we must bow down in complete humility and say, "Woe is me. I am chief among sinners." Those who see the glory of God's holiness, always see the

unworthiness of their own souls. Those who would see Jesus must see their own need of Jesus.

Why don't we have an experience like Isaiah? Could it be because we have made peace with our unholiness, we think it is normal, natural? Do we dwell among an unholy people so much that we are never shocked or surprised or disappointed when we see it in others?

Until we see ourselves as God sees us, we will not be disturbed the way Isaiah was. Only the Holy Spirit can awaken our darkened minds to have a knowledge of the holiness of God and our unholiness in comparison. Only the Spirit of God can open us up to the truth.

### **The Vision of a painful atonement, 6:6-7.**

Those who would see Jesus must see their own need of Jesus and to see the grace of God that He doesn't just kill us as we deserve. What a vision of the glorious grace of God toward sinners.

It is essential you notice the source of that glowing coal taken with tongs from the fire. What is an altar but a place of sacrifice, where the blood of a lamb has been shed as a substitute for the guilt and sins of the people. There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.

Isaiah's hope and help is not from himself, there is nothing he can do. The protection from serious spiritual danger comes from what God provides, an atonement for sin.

Do you cringe at all at the thought of a burning coal touching your lips? It is bad enough to get burned on a tougher part of our body, but to be burned with a hot coal on your lips? There is no way that is not painful.

The seraphim explains the meaning. This was taken from the altar for your sake and applied to your greatest need, this is an atonement that takes away your sin and guilt.

What a vision of an atonement to come. God send His Son to earth, to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, to be our substitute, our atoning sacrifice to redeem us. This symbolizes the finished work of Christ on the cross. Justice is satisfied, mercy is unleashed.

But before it can be applied we must be made to see our sin and confess it and agree with God about how serious it is. Then once God makes us see the depth of our sinfulness, He comes and cleans us up. This is the only way we can be free from the terror of the holiness of God. Atonement makes God's holiness safe.

## **The Vision of a judgment of the people, 6:8-12.**

Let me tell you this next section of our text is every preacher's nightmare.

Isaiah has this incredible vision, he goes through this great soul searching, God meets him in a power way. After this great affirmation he hears a call to ministry, an invitation to go out in the name of the Lord and he accepts. "Here am I, send me."

And then God tells Isaiah that his preaching is going to be ineffective. In fact, his preaching will make matters worse. The people will grow immune, as if inoculated against responding to God's Word. His rebuke will fall on deaf ears and God will be justified in His judgment. They will see and hear, but it won't do any good. The deaf will become deafer, the blind will become blinder.

The first five chapters of Isaiah have been a description of spiritual failure, of stubborn resistance, of turning away from God. So this judgment is deserved. God had warned about this for hundreds of years if they would not obey the Word of the Lord.

Isaiah cries out how long must this be, O Lord? Weeks, months, years? And the Lord tells him plainly. Until the land is ruined, over run by the enemy and the people taken captive and lead far away into exile. And then even what is left will be wiped out.

Isaiah was going to be the prophet in Israel that preached and prophesied during Israel's final decline into defeat and exile. How would you like to be told such a thing?

The Apostle John quotes these words of Isaiah and applies them to Jesus when the people and leaders in Israel refused to believe in Jesus, in His miracles and His words.

Don't be one of those people. Don't let your heart grow cold, don't let your heart become hardened. Don't lose your ability to respond to the working of the Holy Spirit, don't resist and quench the Spirit until God hands you over to your own will and sin.

Beware of making excuses, of finding reasons to resist or delay responding to God. Beware of stiff-arming God, of putting off spiritual things. Beware of thinking sermons always apply to someone else.

Every time you hear a sermon, one of two things happen, either you are a little closer to God or a little further away, a little softer in heart or a little harder in heart. The same sermon that awakens one person, hardens another. Pray for your hearts response to the Word of God.

## **The Vision of a holy seed from a stump, 6:13**

After that vision of judgment comes another vision of grace. God's grace always has the last word. In the midst of civil and national turmoil like the death of a king who reigned for 52 years, the Lord is still on the throne, unmoved. When you cut the terebinth and the oak down to the stump, they will sprout again, there will be life again.

God is a redeeming God, He is always working out His purposes of salvation. Even in the midst of great judgment, God is moving toward the cross, when the seed of the woman will crush the seed of the serpent.

By the grace of God there will be a stump, a holy seed, a stump people and a stump Savior.

### ***Who did Isaiah see?***

The question is who did Isaiah see in his great vision?

Isaiah says "I saw the Lord high and lifted up." In Isaiah 52 Isaiah refers to the suffering servant:

**Isaiah 52:13** Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.

This is a vision of Immanuel, of the coming one, of God with us.

In John 12:41 after quoting from Isaiah 6, John draws the conclusion that Isaiah saw a vision of the glory of the pre-incarnate Jesus.

**John 12:41** Isaiah said these things because he saw his [Jesus'] glory and spoke of him.

This connects with what John said in John chapter one that Jesus was the Word and was with God from the beginning and became flesh and dwelt among us.

**Hebrews 1:3** He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

He is the perfect revelation of God. God reveals Himself through the agency of His Son, in theophanies and in visions.

What Isaiah saw and heard points to Jesus, the glory of God revealed in His merciful atonement. Jesus is God's glory. Jesus Christ is very God of very God. Jesus is God made flesh, made visible. Isaiah was a vision of Immanuel 700 years before the incarnation.

## **Conclusion and application.**

One of the clearest ways you can know the Bible is supernatural is its ability to predict the future. The prophets were empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to say what would happen far into the future.

This is a distinct feature of Christianity. There are no Hindu prophecies, or Buddhist or Muslim. Not one of them can point to a verifiable prophecies that has been fulfilled in time and space.

Isaiah made dozens if not hundreds of such prophecies that we can look back on and see they came to be just as he had said. And his clearest and most powerful prophecies concerned the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Isaiah is one of the most Christ-centered books of the OT.

This is a call to worship the most glorious being in all the universe, the Lord Christ, and for our worship to be fueled by a vision of Christ and His holiness and His worthiness.

This is a call to see His glory spread throughout all creation.

This is a call to be truly moved by the unholiness of our lives, and look to Christ as our only hope of atonement, of purification, of cleansing from sin.

This is a call to respond to His call to love and obey and serve Him.

This is a call to trust the mystery of God's providence.

This is a call to be secure in the stability of Christ's reign over our changing governments.

This Advent let us press in to a greater vision of God, who He is, what He is like, and especially His holiness and our unholiness. Let us consider what it is God has done for us in sending His Son to earth. (C.S. Lewis)

There is no better place to start this pursuit of knowing God better than at the table of our Lord, where we receive bread broken for us and the cup poured out for us for our atonement.

In this Advent season may we renew our desire and commitment to respond to God by saying "Here am I send me, here am I use me."