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Sermon Notes

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## **The Lord of Glory Calls His Messenger**

### **Isaiah 6:1-13**

Today we enter the holy of holies and stand in the presence of the King.

Today, by simple faith in the word of God, we will see the Lord with new eyes, and allow His holiness to search our darkness.

Today, we may lose our pride completely... today, we may see take possession of our souls a deep humility the likes of which we have never experienced before

Today, we stand with Isaiah the prophet and gaze at the face of Christ on His throne

And perhaps, like Isaiah, we will hear His call, **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”** and perhaps like Isaiah we will answer, **“Here am I, Lord... send me!”**

And perhaps for the first time, we will probe the depths of God’s sovereign power even over the wickedness of hardened human hearts who refused to listen and obey.

#### **I. The Lord’s Holiness Exalted (vs. 1-4)**

##### **A. The Central Reality of the Universe: A King on a Throne**

1. The vision is awesome... and the truth is inescapable
2. It is the central reality of the universe... and the reality Satan wants most to conceal... the THRONE of Almighty God... His right to rule... His omnipotence... His exalted status far above everything else in the universe

***Psalm 103:19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.***

##### **B. Context: Political Instability: ‘in the year that King Uzziah died’ (740 B.C.)**

1. Uzziah the longest reigning good king of the Jews... also known as Azariah
  - a. Became king when he was 16 years old; reigned in Jerusalem 52 years
  - b. Good king, walking in the ways of his father David

- c. BUT Uzziah's pride led to his downfall... he illegally entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense, something permitted only for the priests; God struck him with leprosy till the day he died
- 2. Now, this good but tragic king had died... whenever there was the death of a king, there was great uncertainty about the future...
- 3. Isaiah's vision was of the TRUE King of Israel, the Lord of hosts who reigns on a heavenly throne

### C. A Glimpse Into Heavenly Worship

- 1. "I saw the Lord..."
  - a. Hebrew is "Adonai"... common title for Lord, hence word not capitalized all the way through
  - b. Yet, Isaiah later says "LORD"... Yahweh... the true God and Creator... the only God there is

***Isaiah 6:5 my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."***

- c. Now, this is just a vision... no one can see the Lord and live

***Exodus 33:20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."***

So, what did Isaiah "see"? It was a vision of the Lord, true but incomplete... with the full brilliance of His glory muted

***Ezekiel 1:28 This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.***

- d. Seated: enthroned, ruling, sovereign, in power over all things
- e. High and exalted: immensity, infinite power, greatness of His person, overwhelming in majesty and grandeur
  - i) Illus. Karakoram mountains... one in particular, Rakaposhi, is 25,500 feet high, took my breath away... because it rose almost 19,500 feet straight up from the highway! It towered over me and reduced me to absolute nothingness
  - ii) But nothing in all creation is as terrifying and awe-inspiring as God Himself

***Isaiah 6:1 I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted***

- f. "and the train of His robe filled the temple..."

- i) This gives a sense of the regal glory of the King... The train of His robe was exquisitely long

1953, Elizabeth crowned Queen of England; her train was 18.5 feet long, 4 feet wide, made of shimmering silk and decorated by gold filigree and ermine. Certainly as exquisite as man can make... but the train of the Lord seated on His throne filled the whole temple

What temple? Certainly not the physical temple...

***Acts 7:48-50 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: <sup>49</sup> "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord.***

The earthly "temple" was just a shadow of the heavenly reality... Isaiah is having a vision of the Lord in His true heavenly throne-room

## 2. Seraphim

***Isaiah 6:2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.***

- a. Only place mentioned in the Bible; The Hebrew root means literally "burning ones"
- b. The image of fire is strong here... a terrifying purity and holiness characterize the whole scene
- c. They seem to defy description... but they have six wings, not merely two
  - i) Two of the wings are devoted to the covering of their faces... the incredible glory, the brightness of God is overwhelming, even to these holy beings
  - ii) Two of the wings are devoted to covering their feet... reminiscent of Moses being told to take off his sandals for the place is holy ground... the fear of the Lord consumes them... four of their six wings are devoted to worship in the presence of this terrifying and exalted God
  - iii) Two of the wings are devoted to flying... moving around, ready to serve God, to go wherever He may command them
- d. They are so mighty that the sound of their voices causes the temple to shake

***Isaiah 6:4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.***

## 3. The Central Theme: The Holiness and Glory of God

***Isaiah 6:3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."***

- a. Notice that the seraphim are not calling to God, but to each other
  - i) the worship experience was meant to be SHARED COMMUNALLY
- b. The two-fold topic: God's holiness, and God's glory
- c. HOLY HOLY HOLY... Thrice stated... as if the seraphim cannot get enough of exclaiming this word
  - i) Holiness = separation... God is ABOVE all things... infinitely so

A.W. Tozer: "We must not think of God as the highest in an ascending order of beings, starting with the single cell, and going on up from the fish to the bird to the animal to man to angel to cherub to God. God is as high above an archangel as above a caterpillar, for the gulf that separates the archangel from the caterpillar is but finite, while the gulf between God and the archangel is infinite."

Ray Ortlund: "Holy, holy, holy" is not just repetition; it is emphasis. It isn't one + one + one; it's perfection x perfection x perfection. The holiness of God distinguishes him absolutely, even from the sinless angels. The Bible speaks of the splendor of God's holiness (Exodus 15:11), the incomparability of God's holiness (Isaiah 40:25). His holiness is simply his God-ness in all his attributes, works, and ways. And he is not just holy; he is "holy, holy, holy", each word boosting the force of the previous one exponentially.

#### 4. The Whole Earth is FULL of His glory

- a. A few weeks ago, I preach a sermon on the cross as a PRISM... putting the rainbow of attributes of God gloriously on display
- b. So also is creation a full display of God's glory

***Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made***

***Psalms 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.***

The physical creation has God's glory woven into it in every atom... every green leaf, every crawling insect, every roaring lion and every soaring eagle, every windstorm and every constellation proclaims the glory of God

This awesome vision of the Lord on His throne is the center of the universe

## II. The Lord's Messenger Purified (vs. 5-7)

The greatness of this vision of the holy God shatters Isaiah... not only does he see God, but he also sees himself truly for the first time... and the vision shatters any sense of self-righteousness and self-confidence he ever had

A. "Woe Is Me! I Am Ruined!"

***Isaiah 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."***

1. Nothing Is Hidden Before His Eyes

***Hebrews 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.***

2. Our sin is hidden before our eyes...

a. Pride makes us think much more highly of ourselves than we should

b. We do not detect our own sin until we come into the presence of the Lord

3. Isaiah, seeing the awesome holiness of the Lord, immediately feels unclean... and cries out WOE against himself!!

a. True relationship with God begins with brokenness over sin

***Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.***

4. Notice that Isaiah's sense of sinfulness focuses on his **mouth**... the very instrument of his ministry. He preaches, he speaks, he prophecies with his mouth... and the very best he has to offer is still filthy in God's sight

5. If a godly man like Isaiah felt this unclean, what, then, will Judgment Day be like for the ungodly and the unrepentant sinner??

B. The Lord's Messenger Must Be Holy

1. Notice the Lord does not say "Actually, Isaiah, you're a lot cleaner than you thought you were!!"

2. Instead, He purifies him!!

3. Hebrews 12:10 **Without holiness no one will see the Lord**

So also, without holiness no one will serve the Lord

**2 Timothy 2:21** *If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

### C. The Lord's Messenger Purified

**Isaiah 6:6-7** *Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."*

1. a searing coal taken from God's altar represents imparted holiness
2. Only God can make someone holy... only God can purify us from sin
3. He ultimately does this only by one means... the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross
4. Notice also that in this he fits Isaiah to be His prophet... His messenger, to speak fiery words from heaven... to speak words of conviction, and power, of life and death, of salvation and damnation

### III. The Lord's Messenger Recruited (vs. 8)

**Isaiah 6:8** *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

#### A. A General Invitation: "Whom Shall I Send?"

1. Isaiah's call was given by the Lord... since only the Lord can call prophets
2. Yet, it is given generally, as if to His heavenly court
3. The Lord has plenty of servants ready to serve Him at any moment

**Daniel 7:10** *Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.*

4. In a similar way, the scripture records the general call of God for evangelism and missions, for prayer and labor in the fields of the Lord
5. Throughout church history, it has been the courageous ones who have made that general call from the pages of Scripture their specific call to action

#### B. A Specific Response: "Here I Am! Send Me!"

1. Isaiah made that general call his specific call
2. similar to Hudson Taylor's call to China

The great missionary pioneer, Hudson Taylor's biography describes the key moment of his life's work—his calling to be a missionary to China

Hudson Taylor had been struggling with sin in his life, struggling to be fully consecrated to the Lord; He begged the Lord and pleaded with Him—"If you will deliver me and keep me from falling, I will serve you, no matter what you ask me to do!"

At this holy moment, Taylor felt within his heart a clear answer from the Lord;

**"Then go for me to China!"**

From that moment until the day of his death, Hudson Taylor never wavered, but served the Lord for the conversion of Chinese lost people to faith in Christ

The general call for missionaries had become a specific call for him personally

***Who will go for us, and whom shall I send?***

***Here I am... send me!!***

C. Is the Lord Calling You Today?

1. perhaps to repent of sin
2. perhaps to come to Christ for the first time
3. perhaps to witness to a specific lost person at your job, in your family, in your neighborhood
4. perhaps to adopt an unreached people group and pray for them daily for a month
5. perhaps to go on a short term mission trip
6. perhaps to commit yourself to a life of missions

**Bruchko** Bruce Olson was a sixteen year old young man, living in Minnesota... the interdenominational church he was attending had a missions conference, and he heard the phrase "Great Commission" for the first time; as he listened to a missionary named Mr. Rayburn speak about his work in New Guinea, he became intrigued; over the next few months, little by little he was led by God to make a commitment to be a missionary

At age 19, with no prior training, no missions experience, no seminary, no sending agency... just a call from God and \$70 in his pocket, boarded a plane and flew to Venezuela, to meet with a missionary he'd written to named Mr. Saunders. He'd written him and the missionary had invited him to come sometime. He took it seriously and flew to Caracas... but the missionary did not meet him at the airport. He followed an internal call from God that eventually led him to the deep South American jungle where he sought to meet a stone-age Indian tribe called the Motilones. He was shot with an arrow and left for dead... but he

survived and ended up being carried into the village and living with them for years, leading most of the tribe to Christ

All because he personalized the call:

***“Whom shall I send and who will go for us?”***

***“Here am I! Send me!!”***

#### IV. The Lord’s Message Entrusted (vs. 9-10)

***Isaiah 6:9-10 He said, "Go and tell this people: "'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' <sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."***

##### A. No Right to Craft the Message...

Many sermons on Isaiah 6 end with “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” Here am I! Send me!!”

Few sermons address the topic God gave Isaiah... a shocking message of God’s activity in hardening the hearts of His own people against His word

1. The live coal from the heavenly altar also represents the prophetic word
2. The prophet has no right to craft the message, to shape it, to alter it in any way
3. The message MUST be preached just as the Lord entrusted it
4. The prophet has no power to hold it in either... it is a fire within him

***Jeremiah 20:8-9 Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. <sup>9</sup> But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.***

##### B. A Shocking Message of Hardness

1. The message is not the one Isaiah wanted or was prepared to hear
2. It told of the hardness of the hearts of the Jewish people... of how unwilling they were to receive the word of the Lord
3. Not just accidental hardness... judicial hardness by God Himself
  - a. God is confirming Israel in hardness against His own word

- b. Consistently they have resisted the word of God
- c. God gave his analysis of their hearts right away at Sinai

***Exodus 32:9-10 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. <sup>10</sup> Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.***

- d. So they had hardened their own hearts... and so also Satan had blinded them as well

***2 Corinthians 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.***

- e. But the real issue here is God's action in hardening the hearts of His own people

- i) Note the strong verbs...

***Isaiah 6:9-10 He said, "Go and tell this people: "'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' <sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."***

- ii) God is decreeing their rejection of His word resulting in the total destruction of the country
- iii) As a matter of fact, if God didn't harden their hearts, they would see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed!!!

Very similar to the case of Pharaoh, and God hardening Pharaoh's heart to perform all the miraculous signs He had planned

#### C. Answers Central Question: Why Did Israel Reject Christ?

1. This passage quoted five times in the New Testament
2. Three times quoted in reference to Jesus' use of parables... explaining why Jesus used parables—to hide His word from Israel
3. Once quoted by Paul at the end of Acts to warn the Jews not to be like their forefathers by rejecting Christ
4. AND once by the Apostle John, explaining why Jesus' astonishing ministry of miracles did not convince His own people to believe in Him (more in a moment)

5. Israel COULD NOT believe in Christ because He had blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts
6. Romans 9-11 addresses this very issue... why are the Jews rejecting Christ
  - a. The answer in part is that God has sovereignly chosen to harden the hearts of many Jews until His purposes with the Gentiles are accomplished
  - b. Isaiah 6 and Romans 9-11 teach the same thing

***Romans 9:18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.***

***Romans 11:7-8 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, <sup>8</sup> as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."***

Seven hundred years before Christ was born, God had already determined to harden the hearts of the Jews

Why? To save everyone the same way... by grace, by mercy, by His sovereign power:

***Romans 11:32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.***

## V. The Lord's People Humbled... then Exalted (vs. 11-13)

***Isaiah 6:11-13 Then I said, "For how long, O Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, <sup>12</sup> until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. <sup>13</sup> And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."***

### A. Israel Hardened and Judged

1. Isaiah cries out over his people
  - a. Jesus wept over Jerusalem
  - b. Paul had **great sorrow and unceasing anguish** in his heart over the Jews' rejection of Christ and of the gospel
  - c. Isaiah is the same here... in anguish over the message he is to give to the people
  - d. He asks "For how long, O Lord, will this hardness of heart persist?"

e. God's answer is devastating!!

#### B. Israel Humbled and Laid Waste

1. Every city in the Promised Land is going to be devastated... laid waste
2. 90% of the inhabitants will be slaughtered or exiled
3. the houses and cities will lie deserted
4. the fields ruined and ravaged... all by an invading army
5. EXILE: the Lord will **send everyone far away**
6. Even the tenth that remain in the land will again be laid waste... the cycle of judgment and devastation from the Lord will be repeated again and again throughout history

#### C. The Remnant: The Stump in the Land

1. Isaiah is not left hopeless... the tree will be felled, but the STUMP will remain in the soil, with a promise of future restoration
2. the "**Holy seed**" will be the stump in the land... the remnant that Paul speaks of in Romans 11
3. AND at the end of history, the Lord will at last remove the hardness from Israel's heart, the blindness from Israel's eyes.... They at last will look upon Christ, their Messiah, and find salvation in Him

***Romans 11:26-27 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. <sup>27</sup> And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."***

#### D. God's Ultimate Purpose: His Glory

1. God's sovereign control over the hearts of the Jews makes possible a full display of His glory... of His patience, His power, His wrath, His justice, His mercy
2. God's design is to make everyone that is saved, Jew and Gentile alike, totally dependent on His mercy and grace, not on their own achievements or virtue

### VI. The Lord's Identity Revealed (John 12:41)

True identity of the Lord whom Isaiah saw is not fully revealed until the New Testament, especially in John 12

#### A. Israel's Rejection of Christ Predicted, Effected, and Removed

1. In the Gospel of John, the Apostle John is wrestling with the question, “Why after all of Jesus’ miracles, did His own people reject Him, hate Him, crucify Him?”
2. In John 12, at the end of his account of Jesus’ public ministry to the Jews, summarizes it with this amazing quotation of Isaiah 6

***John 12:37-41 Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. <sup>38</sup> This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" <sup>39</sup> For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: <sup>40</sup> "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn-- and I would heal them."***

3. In other words, Israel’s hardness of heart was ultimately the work of God... decreed by God’s sovereign plan, predicted by God’s foreknowledge, spoken through the prophet Isaiah
4. John 12 quotes Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6 to establish the unbelief of the Jews
5. Then comes the bombshell....

#### B. Isaiah Saw Jesus’ Glory

***John 12:41 Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.***

1. The great God of glory, seated on a throne high and exalted, the one whom the seraphim cannot see fully and who veil their faces because of His glory... that one is JESUS!!!
2. The mystery of the incarnation... Jesus of Nazareth is the God of heaven and earth, the creator of archangels and of caterpillars alike... the one who crafted and shaped the mountains
3. This is the one whose blood provides the only sure purifying remedy for sin
4. Isaiah cried out “Woe is me! I am ruined by my sin”
5. The live coal taken from the altar represents Christ... His purifying ministry

## VII. Application

### A. Heavenly Worship of the Savior

1. Understand the glory of Jesus Christ... the same Jesus who was born of a Virgin and laid in a manger; the same Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Judea and whose hands touched the lepers; the same Jesus whose blood was

shed on the cross and whose body was raised from the grave... this is the Jesus whom the angels worship, hiding their faces

2. Not one of us thinks TOO LOFTY thoughts of Christ... all of us think too lowly of Him
3. Magnify Christ in your minds... meditate on what Isaiah saw

#### B. Heavenly Cleansing from Sin

1. Isaiah heart of darkness was deeply probed by the stabbing rays of light coming from the throne of Christ... Isaiah's sin was exposed and laid bare... he was ashamed of it, he learned to hate it
2. So must we be cleansed from sin... we must drink in the heavenly vision of Christ and fall on our faces in repentance and sorrow over sin

***Isaiah 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."***

3. all sin is a failure of FAITH
4. it is precisely because we don't see Christ seated on His throne, high and exalted that we have so little regard for His laws, so little esteem for His holiness
5. If we were in His presence, gazing on His beauty and soaking in His glory, we would be perfectly HUMBLED for eternity... we would be silent in His presence about our own achievements, because they would seem to be nothing and less than nothing in His presence... so a clear vision of Christ destroys PRIDE
6. So also a clear vision of Christ on His throne destroys lust and pleasure-seeking... how can we be drawn away after worldly and illicit pleasures in the face of so great a God, of so perfect and attractive a glory? The lusts of this world would be exposed as the filthy, unclean things they really are and we would be repulsed by them! Better than that, we would be completely captivated by an infinitely higher love... drawn into Christ
7. A clear vision of Christ's glory destroys fear of man... it destroys conflicts between people... it renders us quiet and peaceful, filled with awe, loving each other, free of ambition
8. SO if you want to destroy sin, immerse yourself by faith in the vision of Isaiah

9. HOW??? By Scripture and prayer alone... scripture feeds faith... prayer calls on the name of the Lord to make us conform to the words we read in the Bible

10. live in the heavenly realms and the earth will lose its allure... its filthy power

C. Heavenly Warning to Listen to the Word

1. Israel was hardened to God... their hearts hard toward His authority, their eyes blind to His glory
2. The centerpiece of this was unwillingness to LISTEN with OBEDIENCE to the word He has spoken through the prophets
3. It is a DANGEROUS THING to listen to the word of God faithfully preached and ignore it and go on living in sin

D. Heavenly Calling to Evangelism and Missions

1. God is calling on you to serve Him
2. As in Isaiah's case, the call is generalized, not specific

***Whom shall I send? Who will go for us??***

3. Will you hear the call?
4. What are you doing to advance the gospel to lost neighbors and unreached people groups?
5. Hudson Taylor heard the generalized call and made it specific... **Here I am, send me!!**
6. What about YOU??