

***Worship: Holy, Holy, Holy***

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Either sing together as a group, or have people read each stanza aloud.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;  
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,  
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,  
Who was, and is, and evermore shall be.

Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide Thee,  
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;  
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,  
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;  
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

***Sermon Overview:***

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Holiness. We get different pictures of what that means. If we are a Christian, different adjectives come to mind: bland, boring, banal. Goodness in a strait jacket. But holiness is not primarily about your character and actions; first and foremost, holiness is about God. What we all need, and what we all really want, is an encounter with the Holy God. Our lives are obsessed with the idea of 'more': more money, more health, more happiness. But where is more to be found?

This week's sermon looked at Isaiah 6—a dramatic portrait of one man's encounter with the thrice-Holy God. For Isaiah, this experience was transformative. Hopefully it was transformative for us as well.

**Seeing God**

Isaiah dates his encounter with God to the 'year King Uzziah died.' Uzziah was a great king of Judah. He had significant military victories, he was a tremendous administrator and organizer. His fame stretched to the borders of Egypt. But his pride led to his fall, as he entered the temple in arrogance to burn incense, something only the priests were allowed to do. He was stricken with leprosy and the last years of his life were spent as an outcast. Meanwhile, Assyria was reemerging as a power to the east, and the stories of their conquests were coming to Judah. So it was that year, with the

people of Judah in the face of a weakening king and in the face of an impending threat, in the year king Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the LORD on a throne. And it was real – all of Isaiah’s senses are engaged. Isaiah saw the Lord, but describes nothing of his appearance. He is high and exalted. The train of His robe fills the temple and these incredible flying creatures surround him crying, “Holy! Holy! Holy!” God is holy – separate, other, transcendent. God is holy – morally, ethically pure. The scene ends with temple quaking. But the thing shaken the most that day was Isaiah. He had seen the Lord, and his response is: “Woe is me! For I am lost!”

### **Seeing Ourselves**

In seeing God, we cannot help but see ourselves more clearly. Isaiah had seen the infinite eternal God, and he was lost, ruined. Undone. He continues: “For I am a man of unclean lips.” Why are his lips unclean? As sincere as he has been – he has not been a man in love. His heart and will do not belong fully to God. He recognizes that, and he is undone. You cannot be healed by the grace of God until you are broken by the holiness of God. But Isaiah has not seen the fullness of God’s greatness until God stoops to answer Isaiah’s cry by sending a seraphim with a coal to cleanse his lips. The coal is from the altar, the place where the Holy God accepted and was satisfied by the death of a substitutionary sacrifice. This is a picture of God’s forgiveness and reconciliation, which points us to the cross, where Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, was consumed by God’s wrath, became sin, so that those who are united to him might become the righteousness of God.

### **Seeing a World in Need**

But the story does not end there. There is a pattern in how God interacts with us, in Isaiah, and elsewhere. God appears → humans quake with fear → God calms, heals and restores → God sends to a world in need. So at the end of the passage, when God asks who to send, Isaiah raises his hand. God takes a man with dirty lips and makes him His spokesperson. Isaiah will spend the rest of his life telling his people about God, His holiness, His greatness, His mercy. What people need more than anything else is God, the God-ness of God. Have you experienced this God? This Holy God, whose greatness knows no limit, and whose mercy knows no end? Only in Him will we finally get what we’ve been searching for: more.

### ***Passage for Discussion: Revelation 4:1-11***

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The book of Revelation records how John, like Isaiah, gets a glimpse of God on His throne. The same imagery is present: There are blazing creatures with wings and loud voices, who cry: “Holy! Holy! Holy!” (See Ezek 1 for a similar picture). John uses figurative language, phrases such as “with the appearance of” or “like” because John has seen something so far out of our realm of experience that we do not have the language to describe it. And the picture of God we get is overwhelming. He is beautiful (all the words John can use reflect precious stones). He is powerful and awesome. John speaks of the most powerful forces in nature – lightning, thunder. And he is high, over everything. He is worshipped by incredible creatures, and by all of his people (the 24 elders most likely represent God’s people in the OT – the twelve tribes of Israel – and in the NT – the 12 disciples). Worship is never ending, because God is never ending. As we stand in that throne room with John, we have to wonder: Is this what we think of when we think of God? Is our picture of God too small? Too tame? How would our lives change if we begin to see God in this way?

***Questions for Discussion:***

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**Getting to Know Each Other:**

1. How would you fill in the blank: I would be happier if I just had more \_\_\_\_\_?

**Looking at the Bible:**

2. Read Revelation 4:1-11. How is this passage similar to Isaiah 6?
3. Notice that John uses language such as “appearance of” or “like.” He is trying to describe a scene that defies our language and experience. Understanding that he is using imagery to evoke and to describe, what do you think he is trying to convey about God in this passage? What sense do you get of the majesty of God from John’s description?
4. How are people and creatures responding to God? What do their actions and words reveal about the nature of who God is? How does he relate to his creation?
5. Why is God worthy of worship, according to this passage? Are those good reasons? Are they the reasons we usually give?
6. Imagine you are standing with John in Revelation 4. What would you focus on? What would you be feeling? Thinking? What would you think about God?

**Looking at Our Hearts**

7. What first comes to your mind when you hear “God is Holy”? What pictures or attributes do you associate with holiness? Are you drawn to a Holy God? Why or why not?
8. Have you ever been overwhelmed by God’s holiness, His greatness? What was that experience like? What does God’s holiness tell us about ourselves?
9. How is God’s holiness good news for us? Why should we rejoice in and worship a holy God?
10. How does this vision of God enhance our worship? How does it affect the way we live?

**Praying for Each Other**

*(Here are some ideas from the study to help focus your time in prayer as a group. Use by themselves or along with other prayer requests).*

- Pray that we would experience God in all His holiness.
- Pray that we would see ourselves clearly, and rest on the gospel.
- Pray that we would desire more of God.
- Pray that our group would be a place where we worship God together.