

# Holy, holy, holy – Isaiah 6 – 03 Jan 2021

Well good morning to you. Happy new year. By way of introduction, my name is Dan and I serve here at Corsham as the part of staff team, responsible for the youth ministry. Now as I begin this morning I'd like to start by asking a question. And the question is this: "What do you think is the most important thing about you? What do you think is the most important thing about you?"

While you think about it let me read this quote from a man called A.W. Toza. He says this: The most important thing about us is what comes into our minds when we think about God. Worship is pure or base as the worshipper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the church is always God himself and the most important fact about any man is not what at any time he may say or do but what he in his heart conceives God to be. In other words, according to Toza, the most important thing is not where you live or what job you do, not what financial means you might have or something about your family or what's going on in your situation, but what you think about when you think about God. So what do you think about when you think about God? You know, what words do you use? We all think about God in the day you know and it affects how we live our day today. You know, we all respond to the view that we have whatever canvas view we have of God we can agree to creatively responders to that you see that in the Bible you know Adam and Eve their their view of God is that God's not got their best interests at heart and so they take things into their own hands. Or take David and his brothers: in the same situation, same upbringing, same family and yet the brothers they can't see past the giant and they respond in fear whereas David he responds to the situation in faith. He sees past Goliath because he has a bigger God. It's not just in the Bible. I remember a few years ago with young people I was struck by some research that was done on why young people aged just 8 to 18 were leaving church. The overwhelming response was "they'd outgrown God." They felt that they they knew all there was to know about God and so He no longer had anything relevant to say to their lives. It's tragic. You know for whatever reason, their view of God was so diminished that He had nothing left of worth to say to them. I kind of feel, it's not just with the Bible and young people but also for us. I'm convinced that sometimes our struggles are tied to our street level view of God. Our struggles are compounded not just by the difficulties that we might be experiencing but by the smallness of the gods that we're trusting. You have to listen to some people share their struggles. You know if I believed in the God that they're describing, I wouldn't run to Him for help either! I've been in a panic too and so I think we can all suffer from this kind of divine amnesia and live as if there's no God and it's all on us. And so we worry too much, we regret too much, we try to control too much, we demand too much, we run after too many God replacements because we so quickly forget who God is. And so that's what I want to address this morning. I want to help us see God more nearly as he actually is.

Take Lucy in Prince Caspian. Lucy awakes from a deep sleep and is compelled to get up by the sound of a voice that's calling her name. She follows and shortly after she encounters Aslan himself. "Aslan," said Lucy, "You're bigger." "That's because you're older, little one," said He, "not because I am, but every year you grow, you will find me bigger." Each year we grow, each week, we will find him bigger. And that's what my prayer is for me and for you this year: that our vision of God might grow, not diminish.

So we're going to turn to Isaiah. Why? Because Isaiah is like another list of God's greatest hits. Of God's awesome nature. We're going to turn to chapter 6. Isaiah chapter six, I'm gonna start at verse one:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;

the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the door posts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"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."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

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!"

Well as we unpick this passage together let me pray:

Heavenly Father, I pray that you would open the eyes of our hearts this morning to see you, to behold you as you really are God. Thank you that you are not passive in this conversation about who you are. You know it matters and so you're constantly revealing yourself, showing and defining who you are. Rehearse what we've remembered at Christmas: God would you confront us with you this morning and like Isaiah maybe we'll be changed by that encounter. We ask this in Your name. Amen. Well I'm just going to keep it very simple this morning. I was going to consider simply who God is and some implications of that. So who is God? Well verse 3: we're told He is the Lord Almighty. He is almighty, he's one with absolute power and authority. Isaiah's vision here isn't of God standing in line at McDonald's or sitting on a bean bag playing the latest craze - "Among us" - on His phone. No what we've got is that He's high and lifted up, enthroned. Verse one He is front and centre, He is the Almighty, literally He is the Lord of hosts, the commander of the armies of heaven. And so He can he can wield any and all armies of heaven and earth to accomplish His purposes among the nations. Our God is almighty. More prominently, I want to focus on verse . God is holy. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. He is a holy God. What does it mean for God to be holy? What it means is to be separate, to be set apart. It just describes who God is, He is set apart from us. He's set apart from creation, he's distinct, he's different. He is in a class of his own. God is holy and holiness doesn't describe who God is, it describes anything that God sets apart for his purposes. So in the Bible, you're gonna get ground that is holy, you get the holy

sabbath, your holy prophet, holy mountain. You get that we we're set apart to be a holy priesthood. So that's the first thing: it means to be set apart, to be separate. But a second meaning that flows from that first is to be separate from. See God is separate from evil, he's separate from sin. So there's a kind of moral quality to holiness. To be holy is to be morally pure. It's to be totally good, to be perfect and so that's kind of holiness defined. But perhaps more helpful is what we see in the passage here, is holiness illustrated. First of all look at what the we see and what the angels do. These perfect, sinless creatures are overwhelmed by God's holiness as they fly. They cover their eyes and they cover their feet out of respect for Him. That's how the angels respond. They have never sinned, how much more so us? It reminds us that anyone standing in front of such a God - and one day we all will - can hardly be casual. You can't just stroll up to the God of the universe without trembling. And so that's what the angels do. Second, look at what the angels say: they cry out [verse 3] holy, holy, holy. In scripture whenever a word is repeated it's done for emphasis. It's like underlining or highlighting something in bold. For example in the new testament Jesus says "Truly, truly I say to you" when He wanted to drive home a point. He's saying, "I don't miss this guys, listen up". That's what we've got here. And this is the only time where we see a character trait of God that is repeated. We're told it three times. Now, though God is love, the Bible never says God is love, love, love. Though He is patient, it never says patient, patient, patient. He's gracious but it doesn't say gracious, gracious, gracious. Rather we're told God is holy, holy, holy. Someone said He wants the first thought that we have about God to be His holiness. In the Bible, the first the first and last songs of the Bible big up God's holiness. In Exodus 15 and in Revelation 15. Since we're told it three times you know He's not just a bit holy, He's not just really holy, He is uncompromisingly holy. This is our God, yes God is wonderfully loving and merciful and kind but we can't play games with God. Some of the most chilling accounts in all of scripture are when people showed contempt for His holiness. You can take this away and read yourselves in Samuel , Leviticus , Exodus . In Exodus they're not allowed to go near, they have to purify themselves before going anywhere near the holy mountain. Not even the livestock are allowed to go near because of God's presence and his holiness. It's not just the old testament, we see in Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira. We see in Revelation 6 people that haven't trusted in Jesus are asking the mountains to cover them, they want so much to avoid standing before the presence of God. That God is a consuming fire, He is fearsome in holiness. Picture the sun, that blazing ball of fire that we can see most days. There's no shadow of darkness in it. It burns intensely and because of that you know anything that tries to approach it will be consumed by its fire. Imagine Elon Musk is planning some space travel. Imagine he's offered you a space expedition to the sun. So off you launch. You can have the best radiation equipment, you can have 50,000 factor sun cream on. It's irrelevant. The fire of the sun would consume you there'd be nothing of you left. When it says that God is all holy, God burns with that same brightness, the same intensity. He will consume anything that comes near with even a hint of sin on it. Let's not beat around the bush. To encounter this God with any bit of sin on you will wreck you. Isaiah knows it full well doesn't he? [Verse five] "Woe to me," I cried, "I am ruined, for I'm a man of unclean lips." He says, "I'm a man of unclean lips", unclean is the kind of word that lepers used. "Unclean! Unclean!". So people would keep their distance. What Isaiah is saying is "I'm morally a leper", his imperfection stands in complete contrast to God's white-hot purity. When he says "I'm ruined," it carries the idea of disintegration. God's holiness was about to vaporize him. God's love

wouldn't threaten to do that to us. Neither all His goodness nor His kindness nor His patience nor any other quality but holiness will fry you. Isaiah learns first-hand that God's holiness is not only his most prominent quality but also His most powerful and His most painful quality. When we see how holy God is, it exposes how unholy we are. We see how utterly perfect God is, how perfect, exposed to how imperfect we are; how sinless He is, how sinful we are. Now I know we're all good, moral people; many of us are seeking to live for God in this world, but compared to the brilliance of God's light our light isn't so bright. You might think "Oh I'm not that bad." Maybe, but even if you're one of the best you've still got a massive problem. Imagine, I attempted to sin no more. From now on, I'm going to be good, I'm going to be really good. So one day I managed to reduce down to just 10 sins. I could do better than that, come on, let's imagine I only committed three sins. Just three in a day: just one harsh word, a small lie, a thoughtless action. That'd be a massive improvement right? But here's the problem: if I was to sin only three times a day that's still well over 1,000 sins a year and so as a 37 year old that means I've committed 37,000 sins! So however old you are, you can do the maths.

Now imagine you had to go to traffic court one day. You've been driving too fast and you're in court for it. You're brought in and you're there before the magistrate and the magistrate asks the prosecutor if this person being charged today, if they've been in court before? Any previous? Well imagine the prosecutor was like, "Actually he already has 37,000 traffic offences." Do you think the magistrate's gonna let you off?! Good luck with that! The punishment would be heavy, wouldn't it? Now imagine me facing up to God as a really good person with 30,000 sins already committed. See the problem is God won't even accept a single bit of evil near him. What am I going to do with my 37 thousand? What are you gonna do with yours?

Don't think for one second even the smallest sin that you commit will not be exposed and prove your undoing before the absolute purity of God. Sometimes we can think, "it was just a small sin," "it wasn't that bad." Or we can ask, "How is it fair for God to punish sin with hell?" Maybe our problem is that we haven't grasped how pure and how holy God is and how disgusting sin is to Him. Something must be done. And fast. And that's what we see here. That's what we see here. Graciously, mercifully that's what God does. That's what God does. We've seen that God is almighty. Seeing that God is all-holy, now, through what God does, we see that God is all-gracious, all-loving. Yes, God has had Isaiah face his sin, but now God deals with it. We see, verse six and seven, one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand which had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for. How quickly an angel flies and grabs a hot coal touches Isaiah's lips and his sin is atoned for. This is what God does. God sees our record of wrongs, He sees how we fail Him, how we overstep the mark, how we how mess up again and God doesn't turn away in disgust. He turns towards us in love. He says "I want to do something about it." Our sins are many but His mercy is more. This takes us to kind of to the heart of God. The heart of God we see here is not to smite us for our sin but to forgive it. See amazingly our sin moves God to pity more than anger. Anger for our sin, yes, but that's absorbed by Jesus. We see hints of that here. See where we're told that the coal's taken from the altar and touched his lips and his sins are atoned for? Where does the coal come from? It comes from the altar. And what's the altar? The altar is the place of sacrifice where forgiveness was made possible. It points us towards Jesus, the one who would lay His life down on the altar in sacrifice to make a great exchange,

an exchange that Isaiah's healed lips prophesy. Later in chapter 53 he says that "He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities." The punishment that brought us peace was on Him and by His wounds we are healed. "We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." See that's what Jesus does: He takes the guilt of our sin and pays the ultimate cost. Jesus faces the purity of God clothed in our sin and is ruined and He gives us in exchange His perfect life, His robes of righteousness, robes of right-living, His holiness. Jesus is holy for us so that atonement might be made. That is, that we might be at one with God, restored to God. And so the result of all that is that as we trust Jesus we are made positionally holy, positionally holy. That is that when God looks at us He sees us as His perfect obedient child and so we can approach God with confidence to quote the Hebrew writer. And so we are positionally holy and our task now is one of practical holiness. It's to work that out. God has made you holy, so be holy. God has made you good, be good. You know holiness is not optional and so you want to know God's will for you this year? Be holy, live a life of set-apartness, separate from evil, devoted to God. Of course that's going to be hard isn't it? There's the pressure to conform, it is immense and it's relentless and so God gives us his Holy Spirit to dwell in us and to help us to conform us to his character.

So you see Isaiah has been made to face his sin and then God deals with it. Have you faced your sin yet? are you conscious of it right now? There's only one place to take your sin and that is the feet of Jesus. We see here in Isaiah that we encounter a God who is almighty, a God who's all-holy, a God who is all-loving. Do you see how big God is? You know Isaiah did and he's completely changed by the encounter. That's a sign of a real encounter with God isn't it? It stimulates us to whatever He asks. This encounter leads to a life of service [verse 8] "'Who will go for us?" And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" Isaiah goes from 'wow!' to 'woe' to 'go'. He's restored and now he's like "What about everyone else? Who will tell them? They're living in sin, they're not fearing holy Gods." He goes humbly and it's costly. As you read the rest of the passage, from verse nine, you see that many won't listen, many shut their ears to it. We can read that and think it sounds like God's doing that. But don't trip over the Hebrew idiom there which expresses the result as though it was purpose. God didn't intend to stop people from repenting, He sent Isaiah with express purpose of saving them from judgment. But they won't listen they shut their eyes and they refuse to act. And so many won't listen. It's hard, but the point is that you know Isaiah is willing to go, he's willing to go for God.

You're like Isaiah. God wants you on His team and God has a purpose for you like He did Isaiah. To go and share with others. This God asked you that same question "Who can I send? Who will go for us, on our behalf?" Are you the kind of person who replies, "Send me!" or are you too busy making excuses? Call in sick? We're called to pass on what we've received, "God has done this for me and can do it for you too." "God has lifted me up, He can lift you up too." That's what it means to be a Christian. We see it in the calling in the new testament: calling the disciples in Mark 1. Jesus calls them so they might be with him and they might be sent out again. In Matthew 28, Jesus says "All authority has been given to me and so with that authority I send you. Go and make disciples." And so again, do you want to know what God's will is for you this year? It's to know God and to make him known through your words, through your actions, as you imitate the God who is holy.

At the start we raised the question: "What do you think about when you think about God?" Do you have a lofty view of God? Is he a big deal to you? How is it that God who's so big and so holy could end up such a small deal in our lives? When you go traveling - you remember the days when you were able to go traveling? - and you visit somewhere famous, what is it that you like to do? We take pictures don't we? Where we've been, taking pictures of us with famous monuments. Some people like to get a bit clever, be creative. Imagine we spend a weekend in Paris, you think it'd be cool to take a picture of the us with the Eiffel Tower. But not just us with the Eiffel Tower, let's make it so we're holding the the Eiffel Tower in our hands. In doing so, we can show we're big and mighty and the monument is teeny tiny. It's clever photography but how do you do that? How can you make a monument so huge appear so small? There's only one way: you've got to stand a long way away. Maybe if your God seems so small and doesn't seem to you all-holy and almighty or all-loving. If your sin doesn't weigh you down and there's no need for God to forgive you. Well you can only do that if you've moved a long way away from Him. So today maybe is the moment that you need to come back.

If your God is so small, maybe you've never really met Him. Or maybe you've moved a long way away from where He is. If God seems far from you guess who moved.

Let's pray.

God, I thank You that You are a great big God, You are awesome in power, awesome in holiness, awesome in love. God, please, please grow in us an ever-increasing vision of You. God help us to walk humbly before You by Your Holy Spirit God indwelling in us. Help us to be holy as You are holy and help us to make you known to those around us this year. We pray these things in Your precious name. Amen.

Well today we've only scratched the surface of kind of God's character. It's all we really can do isn't it when you've got a few minutes. It would take an eternity to discover all there is to of the beauty and splendour of God but if you want to take it further then I've got some resources to share with you that will help you to do that. Help you to consider God's qualities, attributes of God, to unpick other qualities of God. Maybe it could act as a reading list for you for 2021. If you want to grow your vision of God, the best place is, of course, the Bible. Get into the Bible and expand your view of God. In the old testament we see God revealing who he is, defining who he is. In the new testament we ultimately see Jesus disclosing who He is. Here are some resources:

- .Some videos, called "Seeing God as a perfect father" Louie Giglio ;
- ."Knowledge of the holy" A.W. Toza ;
- ."Big God" Orlando Saer ;
- ."Awe" Paul Tripp ;
- ."A portrait of God" Daniel Chamberlain.

One other thing that I personally find helpful, particularly in prayer, is to use a list of attributes of God. I've got a list that I use, just taking one a day before I start praying and reading the Bible. Just pause and think about one of these attributes and what it means to me that God is this. What difference it makes to me that God is that. And just giving thanks that he is that that kind of quality. So if that would be useful to you then just get in touch with me and I can mail this attributes of God list to you.

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