

I Saw the Lord

Isaiah 6:1-13

One of my favorite stories is when Moses asked to see God. He was afraid, as God had just told him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land. God promised to go with Moses, but Moses wanted an assurance.

Ex. 33:14 And [God] said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

A further promise,

Ex. 33:17 So the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

Then Moses' great request, to satisfy his fears.

Ex. 33:18 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

Such a bold and forthright request. This was God's answer,

Ex. 33:19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." 20 But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." 21 And the Lord said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. 22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. 23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

So there's the point, "no man shall see Me, and live." So great is the glory of God, that this literal reality is a great warning to us. If you see God, as a fallen, sinful creature, you will die. The presence of his glory will kill you. The closest image to explain

that is the glory of the sun. If you look at the sun, it will harm your eyes. If you stare at the sun, you will go blind. There is simply too much light. Too much glory. And that's how we ought to perceive God. Too much glory to see and observe with our naked eye.

Paul defines God as one,

1 Tim. 6:16 "...who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power."

Indeed, the ability to see God is part of the future glory of the new heaven and new earth. Only then will we be able to see him, and live!

1 John 3:2 "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

But now, having said all that look at our text in Isaiah this afternoon. Isaiah saw the Lord.

v.1

The year was 740 BC, as best we can date it. One of the eight good kings of the southern nation of Judah died. He had reigned for 52 years. And it began with a glorious, glorious vision.

I. A VISION OF THE LORD.

v.1-3

At the risk of losing the simple majesty of the words themselves, let me add that,

A. The Lord is characterized by an exalted glory.

He is king, sitting on a throne. He is high and lifted up. And the train of his robe filled the temple. And he is holy, set above and apart everyone and everything else in all of creation.

v.3

The vision is very similar to the vision John has of heaven itself, isn't it? John saw,

Rev. 4:1 "...a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." 2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. 3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. 4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6 Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

That is how God makes himself known—by his holiness. That is his distinctiveness. His separateness, that which distinguishes him from all his creatures. And this idea of holiness is what defines the glory of God. This idea of holiness is what defines the presence of the glory of God which fills the temple!

To be holy is to be set apart, to be hallowed or sanctified in sacred distinction from everything else. And though this is an attribute of God which is at least partially communicated to us, holiness by definition is the distinctive identification of God. Let me give you some cross references for this idea of God's holiness, the exalted glory which sets God apart.

Exodus 15 is Moses' song of praise upon the deliverance God gave the people of Israel at the Red Sea during the exodus out of Egypt.

Ex. 15:1 "Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! 2 The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him...11 "Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders? 12 You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them. 13 You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength To Your holy habitation."

Who is like you? None, no one. Who is like you, glorious in holiness? No one! Absolutely no one.

Is. 45:5 "I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; 7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things."

"I am the LORD, and there is no other." Even the seraphim understood that, those angelic beings Isaiah mentions, those unfallen creatures who worshiped God in heaven.

v.2

They show to us,

B. The appropriate response to the exalted glory of the Lord.

They have six wings. Three pairs. As EJ Young comments, “As a sign of reverence and awe before the holy Lord, each seraph covered his face with two of his wings. The sight of God wrought humility in the beholder, and the covering of the face would also preclude any irreverent beholding of the Lord...With two he covered his feet—perhaps done as an expression of humility and unworthiness...With two wings also the seraphs flew in order to carry out the will and orders of the Lord.”

So even the unfallen, sinless angels cover their face, with reverence and awe before the Lord. And the covering of their feet seems to be a further expression of humility and modesty. Even though they were sinless creatures, still they recognized what was so obviously distinctive about God. And they respond appropriately. As should we!

This vision of Isaiah continues with what describe as,

II. A VISION OF OURSELVES BEFORE THE LORD.

In other words, humility. Reverence and awe! Look at what Isaiah sees next. Or, I should say, what he feels next.

v.4

The posts were shaken, by the glory of the presence of God. The temple shook. And it was filled with smoke, evidences of God’s glory, for remember, he is a consuming fire. Surely Isaiah understood that he was in the presence of God, the God of justice. This is intended to be a declaration of God’s power. Specifically even, his justice. It is,

A. A recognition of God’s justice.

It is intended to be intimidating. Isaiah gets the point. It’s a point we need to grasp as well. The glory of the justice of God! And in that context,

B. A recognition of our sinfulness.

Look at Isaiah’s own response to the vision of God.

v.5

The glory of God’s holiness renders fallen man infinitely unworthy. There is no place for self-esteem in the presence of God. Just, “Woe is me, for I am undone.” Woe is me, I am cut off. Woe is me, I am destroyed! I am dead!

That’s what a sinful creature is compelled to cry out in the presence of God. “I am undone.” I am doomed to die. The presence of the holiness of God does not allow worship to be seeker sensitive! Rather, by contrast to God, it renders fallen men infinitely unworthy. “I am undone.” It is an agonizing cry. “Woe is me” is a passionate cry of deep despair.

So, the question again, what does the glory of God have to do with us? How does this affect us even as we gather to worship the Lord this afternoon? We should be struck by this same realization as Isaiah. The response to the presence of God is straightforward, “Woe is me, for I am undone...” And lest you think we ought not to imitate Isaiah’s response, lest you think that the enlightened age in which live has finally and appropriately rid us of these tendencies to think badly of ourselves, look at what Jesus has to say.

John 12:35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you

may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them. 37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, 38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" 39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: 40 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." 41 These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. 42 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

Jesus affirms Isaiah's own words, words of God's judgment, for as Jesus says, "Isaiah saw God's glory and spoke of Him." Same God. Same glory. Same human response from fallen, sinful creatures. "Woe is me, for I am undone." In the presence of God, you and I ought to be confronted with this sense of our absolute and infinite unworthiness.

With good reason. Because of our sins. As soon as Isaiah saw God, he saw his own sins. That's what the holiness of God does. That's the effect of the glory of God upon sinful creatures, the simple realization, "God is holy and I am not." And so we have in Scripture many examples of the necessity of God's people confessing sin. Such as,

Ps. 51:1 "Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. 4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight-- That

You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. 6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom."

And,

Ezra 9:5 "At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God. 6 And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. 7 "Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day."

That's what the glory of God has to do with us as God's people today. It confronts us with our own sinfulness, that when we enter God's presence, we might come to him with repentance, seeking his forgiveness. And that's what we have here,

III. A VISION OF THE GOSPEL.

Specifically, forgiveness of sins. It is so marvelously clear here,

A. The great gospel blessing of the forgiveness of sins. v.6-7

The solution to the problem of guilt is not to ignore the reality of your own sin, as if by the power of positive thinking you can make guilt go away. No, the solution to the problem of guilt is to confess your sins that God might take your guilt away!

Just look again at what God does for Isaiah!

v.6-7

Your sin is atoned for. Purged! It's removed from you. The propitiation of God's wrath has been accomplished. The curse of his judgment is removed. By God's own action, not by anything that you do yourself. If nothing else, that's what you learn about worship from the tabernacle and the temple worship of the Old Covenant.

And so we read,

1 John 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

Or, Psalm 103:10 "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."

So God cleanses us. That's the gospel. God washes us. And just as the seraph flew to Isaiah and touched his mouth with the live coal from the fire of the altar, in the same way our iniquities are taken away and our sins are purged. God removes them from us as far as the east is from the west. That's Christian faith. That's Christian worship. As David prays in Psalm 51, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

What a glorious vision. And just to add a fitting conclusion, though we won't spend much time on it this afternoon, please

note how,

B. The great work off the gospel spreads throughout the world.

That's what this vision was all about, God sending the prophet to proclaim the gospel to the world. But sadly, notice as well how badly that message will be received.

v.8-12

Yet there will always be hope! God will have his remnant. God will have his people. God will save his people. Then. And now.

v.13

The nation may be burned in judgment, but the stump remains! The tree may be cut down, but the stump remains. The remnant. Here that is described as a tenth. Despite the promised judgment upon the nation for their unfaithfulness, a tithe of the people will still belong to the Lord. A holy seed.

Such a great vision. Such a glorious hope. And such an exalted God.

Please gain the benefit yourself of this vision. Consider the exalted glory of God, and recognize your own sinfulness. Then, as you confess your sins with a broken and contrite heart, ask for the Lord's forgiveness of those sins with the image of that burning coal in the hand of the seraphim, touching your mouth, and purging away your sin.

To you who thus confess your sins, trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ as the atoning sacrifice for your sins, let me then declare to you the promise of the gospel. "Your iniquity is taken away, Your sin is purged."