

life group study guide

INDESCRIBABLE Isaiah 6



March 4 – *Isaiah 6: Indescribable Holiness*

What does it mean that God is holy? What does it mean to people? What does it mean to us? Where does it lead us and to what action does it point us?

1. The Indescribable Holiness of God – A Brief Description.

Read Isaiah 6:1-8; Revelation 1:17-18 and chapter 4; Lev. 20:26; Ex. 3:1-6, 33:19-23; Mt. 5:48; Hebrews 10:3-22. Then consider especially the following:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven’s Armies! The whole earth is filled with his ‘glory!’” Isaiah 6:3

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty – the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.” Revelation 4:8

In both Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, God is described as being perfectly holy. The threefold repetition *super* emphasizes how holy He is (to paraphrase some today – “*like, totally!*”) – He is ultimately and absolutely perfect in moral purity and in separateness from all the rest of creation. This month, Matt is encouraging everyone to read the book of Isaiah. If you do, you probably will notice this description of God: ***“The Holy One of Israel.”*** This *is* Isaiah’s characteristic title for God – he uses it 25 times! Professor Cottrell of CBS (Matt’s, and many of our staff’s *alma mater*) says that God’s holiness means that He is “absolute moral perfection and purity, that He is unconditionally upright in His *essence* and His *actions*.”

Q. Have you ever had a meeting or discussion with someone who you saw as almost perfectly holy – I am thinking of someone like a Billy Graham or Mother Teresa? How did you react – how did you feel? Did you go away inspired or discouraged?

Q. What does God’s holiness mean to you and how do you react to it? Have you always felt this way or was there a time when you saw God’s holiness in an entirely different light?

Q. What do you think when you read the descriptions of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6 and the Four Living Beings/Creatures of Revelation 4 and of their actions? Remember that both Isaiah and John are being given glimpses into heaven and that they are trying to describe, in the best way they can, heavenly realities in earthly language – so the descriptions should probably not be taken exactly literally, but as symbolic of that heavenly reality. What might it mean that the Seraphim cover their faces and feet? What is your reaction to the almost continuous worship described in Rev. 4?

life group study guide

2. The Un-holiness of People (At least to start with) – A Big Problem.

Isaiah's reaction to seeing the Lord (Is. 6:5): *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"* (ESV) The New Living Translation translates the first part of verse 5: *"It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. . . "*

The Apostle John's initial reaction to his vision of the Risen Christ: *"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead."* Rev. 1:17

"He [God the Father] alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him." 1 Timothy 6:16.

"No one may see me and live." Exodus 33:20

"God is the only comfort, He is also the supreme terror: the thing we most need and the thing we most want to hide from. He is our only possible ally, and we have made ourselves His enemies. Some people talk as if meeting the gaze of absolute goodness would be fun. They need to think again." C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity.

I don't think people today understand what it would mean for them to meet God. For a sinner, such a meeting should hold nothing but terror. If it doesn't, as C.S. Lewis says (above), "they need to think again." People today don't like thinking of a holy God and they don't like thinking that they are sinners. It is much easier and much more comforting to think that, whatever we do or think, God will overlook it because, "well – nobody's perfect, and He knows that, and it's not like I'm as bad as some people." Yes, it's true – God does love us, but as we saw in point 1, He is also unalterably Holy! See if you think this statement rings true today (and maybe in most ages?):

"We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven – a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see young people enjoying themselves', and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, 'a good time was had by all'." C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain.

But Lewis goes on to say that we have a Heavenly Father, not a heavenly grandfather, and because He loves us, *"we cannot even wish, in our better moments, that He could reconcile Himself to our present impurities."*

Q. How do you reconcile God's love and His holiness, or do you even try? Couldn't God just overlook our sins – forgive and forget, so to speak? Why or why not?

Q. If you are a parent, how do you balance your view of morality or good behavior with the sin you see in your children (if they are old enough)? Do you just overlook and forgive or do you expect or demand something else? Is it even possible for true love to merely condone bad behavior in the loved one?

The Bible, and most wise people, say no to the last question. The deepest love is not and cannot be content with imperfection in the loved one. And that brings us to the solution.

3. God's Work to Make Us Holy – to Make Us True Sons and Daughters.

"Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, 'See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven'" Is. 6:6-7 ESV translates the last half of verse 7 as *"your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."*

life group study guide

“But he laid his right hand on me and said, ‘Don’t be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look – I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.’” Rev. 1:17-18

“It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. . . For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time. . . our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. . . And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus.” Hebrews 10:3, 10, 12, 19.

Q. Where did the burning coal come from that touched Isaiah’s lips? What happened on the Old Testament Temple altar? So, did God just decide to ‘forgive and forget” Isaiah’s sins? According to Hebrews 10, what is the real reason that a Holy God is able to forgive Isaiah and John so that are allowed to see God?

Q. What is the first thing that the Risen Christ says to John in his vision in Rev. 1:17? How does that correspond with Hebrews 10:19?

4. The Result of Our Christ-Given Holiness – Saved for Good Works.

“Then I heard the Lord asking, ‘Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?’ I said, ‘Here I am. Send me.’” Is. 6:8

Q. Compare the Isaiah of verses 5 and 8. How do you account for such a transformation?

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:10

Q. Considering all of this, is there any reason why we can’t serve God boldly today?