

The Holiness of God: The Trauma of Holiness, Part 2

Isaiah 6:5-8

We tend to soft-pedal the biblical portrait of God. We do this because *the holiness of God is traumatic to unholy people*. We don't want to experience Him.

Trembling before God

John Calvin - *there is a pattern to human responses to the presence of God in the Scripture. It seems that the more righteous the person is described, the more he trembles when he enters the immediate presence of God.*

When Habakkuk experienced the holiness of God, he said, "My lips quivered, my body trembled, and rottenness entered into my bones" (Hab. 3:16).

When Job experienced the holiness of God, he said, "I abhor myself. I repent in dust and ashes. I have spoken once; I will speak no more. I will take my hand and put it upon my mouth" (Job 42:6).

Calvin - the uniform report of sacred Scripture is that *every human being who is ever exposed to the holiness of God trembles in His presence*. That was no less true of Isaiah.

Weal and Woe

Isaiah was considered the most righteous man in Jewish society of the time. When he got a glimpse of the holiness of God, he said, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa. 6:5).

In the Old Testament, God anointed individuals to be his spokesmen. These individuals were called a prophet. The simple definition that distinguished the prophet from the priest in Israel was this: *it was the task of the priest to speak to God on behalf of the people; it was the task of the prophet to speak to the people on behalf of God*. They prefaced their words by saying, "Thus says the Lord." They understood that they were vessels of divine announcement.

This divine announcement came through "the oracle." The oracle was of two types: *the oracle of weal, and oracle of woe*. This means that there were announcements that came from God which were good news, and announcements which were bad news.

An oracle of weal was also known as *an oracle of prosperity*. This oracle of good news was always introduced with the word "Blessed." Jesus obviously uses the form of the oracle, self-consciously, as a prophet when He gives the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:3-9

The flip side of the oracle of weal was the *oracle of woe, which was a grim and terrifying announcement of God's judgment*. Amos 1:3

Jesus, when He gave His scathing denunciation of the Pharisees, prefaced His words of judgment using the Old Testament prophetic oracle. Matt. 23:15

The only attribute of God that is ever repeated to the third degree is the attribute of holiness: holy, holy, holy. But it's not the only thing that is repeated to the third degree. Jeremiah gave the judgment of God before the temple. (Jeremiah 7:4) Jeremiah was saying, in effect: "Your hypocrisy is to the nth degree. You trust in lying words that cannot profit." Superlative repetition is also used in Revelation 8:13. A heavenly figure will fly across the darkened sky announcing the final judgment of God: "Woe, woe, woe"

“I am Undone”

Isaiah is called of God and set apart as His prophet. His words are the very words of God placed in his mouth, and the first words, *the first oracle he pronounces is an oracle of doom upon himself: “Woe is me!”*

As soon as Isaiah sees the unveiled holiness of God, he understands who God is. And the very second that Isaiah understood who God was, he understood who Isaiah was. He curses himself: “Woe is me! for I am undone.”

“Undone” - Isaiah is experiencing *psychological disintegration*. He is considered the most righteous man in Jewish society, who gets one glimpse of the holiness of God, and is undone. This is why we spend our whole lives avoiding God and His holiness. We know instinctively that as soon as the holy appears it exposes and reveals anything and anyone who is not holy by virtue of His holiness.

We have a justification for every sin that we commit. We are masters of self-deceit. 2 Cor. 10:12

Nobody’s Perfect

Everyone knows that they are not perfect, but that doesn’t seem to bother us at all. We don’t understand the seriousness of not being perfect. God will not judge us on a curve, but on the standard of His holiness.

“Everybody’s entitled to one mistake.” We are so comfortable with our imperfections. We judge ourselves by each other, no matter how ashamed I may be of the weaknesses in my life.

We are quick to excuse ourselves. We find a way to excuse ourselves, and to flatter ourselves, *until we see the standard*. When that happens, *we are undone as Isaiah was undone*. Isaiah 6:5

A Dirty Mouth

Jesus taught repeatedly that someday every human being would be called to give an account before holy God. Everything we have said or done will be judged. Jesus said that it’s not what goes into a man’s mouth that defiles a man; it’s what comes out. Matt. 15:11

We have dirty mouths. When Isaiah saw the holiness of God, his hand went instinctively to his mouth as he cried out this curse upon himself.

“Your Sin is Atoned”

When Isaiah cried this curse upon himself, God did not console him, chastise him, or offer him cheap grace. He, instead, ordered one of the seraphs to take a burning coal with tongs and touch Isaiah’s lips with it.

The coal was applied to cauterize his lips—to *purify him, to heal them, to prepare them for the message that he was to give*. Isaiah 6:6-7

God said to Isaiah: “It’s gone, Isaiah—all your guilt. You don’t have to speak the curse any longer. I’m taking it away. Your sins are forgiven; they are atoned for.”

Then God says, “Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?” Isaiah says, “Here am I. Send me.”

The price of repentance is very, very painful. True repentance is honest before God, and to come into the presence of the holy God is a painful thing. But when we come humbly, as Isaiah did—when we come on our face—God is ready to forgive, to cleanse, and to send.