

Holy

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[0 : 00] Well evening everyone, let me encourage you to have Isaiah 6 open in front of you as we turn to God's word this evening. Really simple question to kick us off.

When was the last time you felt well out your depth? Have a think about it. Ten seconds. When was the last time you felt well out your depth? Know the feeling, don't we?

Remember, here's one for me. I was thinking about it this week. One of the first ever bits of work I got as a young lawyer. I was speaking to the person who was dealing with the other side of the case. And he asked me a question and I realized I've not got a scooby what the answer is because I'm just in the door.

And I asked my boss who says the classic answer of just go and look it up. So I leg it to the library in the firm I'm working at and I find the book.

Right, I find the book and I look at the front cover of the book. And I see the name on the front cover. And I think to myself, that name sounds really familiar.

[1 : 05] And then it slowly dawns on me that it's the guy who I'm dealing with on the other side. This guy has written the book.

And so it dawns on me again, I'm going to have to go back into that room, pick up the phone, as it were, and come toe to toe with the guy who's written the book.

Talk about feeling out of your depth. So take that feeling of feeling out of your depth and multiply it by a hundred.

And even then I don't think we're going to get close to how the man in this passage tonight, Isaiah, feels as he comes face to face with the creator, the sustainer, and the very source of all things.

Here's what I think we do as we come to this topic of holy, our holy God tonight. That we think we come in here, we automatically think that God is just a slightly bigger and better version of us.

[2 : 05] Right, that we're kind of championship and he's premier league. But the reality is that this God who we come to worship this evening is just so far above the things of this earth.

And the call of this tonight is to feel out your depth and to come and worship the holy God. So come with me to verse one of Isaiah chapter six. Let me give you a little bit of context to this because I think it adds, takes something 2D, makes it 3D.

Okay, verse one of Isaiah chapter six. In the year that King Uzziah dies. Now, Uzziah is the king of Judah. He was the king of Judah for 52 years. And in his reign, it's a time of military, great military expansion.

It's a time of peace. These are really fruitful times for this nation of Judah. And so this guy dies in 742 BC because God strikes him down with leprosy because at the end of his reign, it's filled with pride and disobedience.

So you've got a lot of things going on here. You've got the nation of Judah being vulnerable. You've got the throne being empty. And you've got the nations round about them getting bigger and bigger. And the threat is real.

[3 : 16] So make no mistake that in the year King Uzziah dies, this is a year of national identity crisis for the people of Judah. What does our future hold?

Who's going to lead us? What's ahead of us tomorrow? Have you ever felt that? Crossroads in your career? Coming to the end of school, what's next? University, picking a job, what should I do?

Maybe you're stuck in a job. I don't know. All these kind of things where we think, what does the future hold? And it's no accident that it's at this moment that Isaiah encounters the Lord.

Now, come with me and see the description of him. And you'll see the point here. Okay. Where is God? God is sitting on his throne. You see it? God is high and lifted up. The train of God's robe fills the temple.

So this is King language here. This is the splendor of the King. Surrounding him are holy seraphim. [4 : 14] These are not cute and cuddly angels. These are awesome and frightful looking angelic creatures who cover their faces and fall down. And in response to coming before this God, they cry out.

Do you see it? Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory. So here's our topic tonight. The Lord is holy.

The Lord is holy. It's the most commonly used word in the Bible to describe the Lord. And it's the one word from which all other words to describe him are derived.

Right? So God's perfect love. God's justice. God's grace. God's faithfulness. God's mercy. God's patience. God's kindness. All have their origin in his holiness.

It's the foundation for everything that God is and that God does. It's interesting. This holy God created the world.

[5 : 15] He created the world out of his holiness. It's amazing in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 how perfect everything is. Why? Why? Because this God is holy. He's holy.

Quick word study. This word has two aspects to it. Firstly, that means that this God is set apart.

He's set apart. So this God is so far above the things of this earth.

He is totally distinct. He is totally other. So when God says I am holy, he means that there is no one like me. I am incomparable.

He is eternal. He is eternal. He is eternal. We are finite. He is all powerful. We are weak. He is big. We are small. He is set apart.

And secondly, he is perfectly pure. He is crystal pure. He is ferociously holy.

[6 : 13] And this means, because of who he is, that he cannot tolerate sin. By his very nature, he intensely rejects evil. And it's why that we can look on our new screens and see what's going on in Ukraine and think about all the things that are going on and know how God feels about that.

That he sees every single bullet. That he sees every single punch to the face. He sees it all. And he intensely rejects evil. And so when the seraphim here describe, say to the world, this God is holy, holy, holy.

This is what they are saying. Set apart, perfectly pure. This is our God. And you see that they say it three times. So to emphasize something in the Hebrew language, remember you don't have bold or italics like we would.

You emphasize something through repetition. So to say it three times is to say, God, this God is so holy. His holiness goes to the umpteenth degree.

It's like my kids. They always say gazillion. Right? Gazillion. Now notice Isaiah's instant reaction. The first thing he's aware of is not his smallness.

[7 : 29] It's his sinfulness. He feels dirty in the presence of this holy God. Now remember who this is. This is Isaiah the prophet. This is likely one of the most devout men in all of Israel at this point.

It's a huge point of application for us here. Because had Isaiah compared himself with his peers, I reckon he would have done pretty well. And it's what we instinctively do all the time, isn't it?

We think about people and we compare ourselves to other people. And we think to ourselves, eh, I'm actually not all that bad. But when Isaiah finds himself standing in the presence of holy God, the only thing that he can do is fall prostrate and say, woe is me.

Because he's aware of his sinfulness, right? I reckon it's like one of those crime dramas, if you watch them, where, you know, they walk into the crime scene and the thing looks spotless. And all of a sudden they dim the lights and put the UV light on it.

And all of a sudden you see that there's blood everywhere. Yeah? There's human DNA everywhere. This thing is a mess. It's exactly what Isaiah is saying.

[8 : 35] I'm walking into the presence of holy God and bam, the lights are off, the UV lights are on. And I see the mess of my sin. I am nothing and I live amongst a people who are nothing.

And then notice Isaiah's only hope. God's hand of grace reaches out to cleanse him as one of the seraphim takes a burning coal and touches Isaiah's lips with it.

The coal taken from the altar. And see this word, what does it do? It atones for his guilt. See the word atone, it's a gospel word right at the heart of the good news of Jesus.

It's atonement. At one make. Made one with God. And if you're an Old Testament Israelite, what you know is that your real sins require real blood sacrifice.

But the blood of bulls and goats is never going to cut it. It's an active parable that pointed to the Lamb of God who would once and for all take away the sin of the world.

[9 : 38] You see the cross where Jesus dies, where he sheds his blood, is the place where the perfect love and the perfect justice of this holy God kiss.

They meet. And the cross is the place where atonement is made for our sin and Isaiah's sin. Where Jesus took the punishment that you and I deserve for our sin against this God on himself, paying the debt of our sin, appeasing God's holy wrath against us, satisfying it.

And in him we know his holy life. And so this is the holy God who, as we were singing, calls us near in Christ Jesus because through Jesus our sin has been atoned for.

He calls us near and he does more than that. This is the holy God who sends his spirit to live in the hearts of all his people, breaking the power of sin in their lives and enabling them to live the holy life that our holy God has called his people to live.

It's almost as if when you read the gospels, when Jesus transforms people, it's almost as if you read the subtext there that we were made in God's image and sin has marred that image.

[10 : 58] And it's almost as if God, Jesus, redeems us, he saves us, God saves us. And the point of it is as if to say, I want you to bear that image once again. The image that wants to worship me.

To be the redeemed new covenant people of God who live by faith in Jesus Christ, that attractive community of salt and light. Right? Take it like light on a hill.

Moths attracted to the light. Light, you can see it for everywhere. I remember when we were in the Malawi, there was a South African family we got to know, loved the braai, right? Barbecue. I remember tasting it and thinking, that looks, tastes all right.

And he said, put a little bit of salt in it. Oh, incredible. Blessing to their communities. Attractive community of salt and light, a holy community. And the thing is, when you turn to the New Testament, you find the apostles constantly urging the early Christians to be that holy community. Who by God's indwelling Holy Spirit, help image the glory of God to the world. And this is where we tap into our verses in 1 Peter tonight.

[12 : 08] If you want to flick there. Peter, remember, he's writing at a time when Emperor Nero's widespread persecution of Christians has either just kicked off or it's just about to kick off.

And Peter, remember, this man who's tasted the grace of Jesus. This man who knows what it is to fail. This man who knows what it is to be restored.

What does he want? The Christians that he's writing to, to know. Chapter 2, verse 9. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

Do you see the language? A holy nation. God's special possession. This is who they are. And you see, everything that we do flows from who we think we are.

Who are they? They are God's special possession. And the thing is, how does he want them to live as God's special possession? The holy nation. I guess there's three options for them if you think about the context in which they live.

[13 : 13] And if you think about the context in which we live. Three options. Option number one, they could back off. They could retreat. They could become hermits living away out in the middle of nowhere.

And they could do their own thing. Come out of the world, back away from everything and everyone in society and retreat into a holy huddle. Could do that. Does he say that? No, he doesn't say that. He doesn't want them to back off.

Option number two, I guess they could blend in. Keep their heads down. Just become like everyone else. Does he say that? No, he doesn't say that. Doesn't say back off.

Doesn't say blend in. He says, verse 12, live such good lives among the pagans. Do you see that word? Among. So he doesn't, what does he say?

He says, stay in and stand out. And so in the time we have left, I just want to pick out three words that Peter uses to help them see what holiness will look like in their everyday lives.

[14 : 13] Okay. We'll rattle through these really quickly. And these are going to be the questions that are going to go on to our discussion. So here's what he says. Firstly, verses 11 and 12, he goes personal.

And he says, here's what holiness is going to look like in a body that fights you. What's it going to look like? See the word? It's going to look like abstaining. There's a verb, abstaining.

And what Peter's telling them is that there is a battle raging down deep in their souls between the old them and the new them. And as God's chosen people, their lives need to be marked by a dogged determination to say no to the sinful desires that wage war against their soul.

Feel the strength of that language, wage war. That's what's going on in our hearts when we feel the tug towards our old way of living. And to give in, he's almost saying, is to take a machete to our hearts.

That's what's going on. So strong is the language that he's using here. The practices that used to dominate their lives, the thoughts that used to occupy their minds, the words that used to flow from their lips.

[15 : 25] What he's saying is put sin to death. Right? I don't know about you, but I've never been so aware of the need to wash my hands.

Did it tonight. Do it every single shop I go into. Have it in my pocket, little thing. Two years ago, I was saying to someone this morning, had never heard of that. Looked at people strangely that did that.

And now I'm so aware of the need to kill the germs. Every time, kill the germs. Kill the germs. We're all doing it. That's what he's saying. Same way you kill the germs, kill the sin.

Kill it. Abstain from it. And don't just be about weeding. Be about seeding. Do you see? Be known for your good deeds. Here's what he's urging them to be.

A community of individuals who are marked by a compelling Christ-like consistency. Love it. Our friends down at Charlotte Chapel. Their motto, their mission is to be conspicuous for Christ.

[16 : 26] Love it. So in our world that says you only live once. In our world that says as long as it's not hurting anybody, go for it. In our world that says it's my body, I'll do with it as I wish.

In our world that says what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. And I've been in football teams where that is paraded around like there's no tomorrow. Peter says God's holy people be marked by what? Abstaining. This body of yours is Jesus's. So let me ask you, all of us tonight, in our battle with sin, are we abstaining?

Are we in the fight? Right? Wrestling with the Spirit's help to say no to sin and yes to Christ. Does sin, as it rears its ugly head in our lives, does it break our hearts?

And do we have a desire to change? And if that's you, let me encourage you that that desire to fight, to be in the game, is not a sign of failure. It is a sign of faith.

[17 : 27] And when we fail, remember two S's, we have a Savior. There is now, Romans 8, 1, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For those of us who are feeling beaten up by our failures, let's remember that.

And let's remember second S's, that we have the Spirit living inside of us, the helper. And I take it, this is how it works out in my life, when the enemy would come at me, reminding me of the gospel. You're not saved, Graham, because of who you are. You're not saved, Graham, because of the good things that you do. You're not saved, Graham, from anything other than your mistakes and by the grace of Jesus. From what he's done for you.

The helper, the Holy Spirit, pushing us in the direction of Christ's likeness, reminding us of the gospel. Do you see how the battle for holiness, it starts in the heart.

So Peter would say, here's what holiness looks like in a body that fights you. And secondly, this is verses 13 to 27. Peter goes social. And he says, here's what holiness will look like in a world that oppresses you.

[18 : 32] And what's it going to look like? It's going to look for them like doing. Right? Peter says, although you are aliens and strangers in the world. And get that description of you tonight. You're an alien and a stranger.

Meaning what? You're not from here. But I've lived here my whole life. But you're not from here. You're from heaven. Make it your business as alien and strangers in the world to rub shoulders with people.

When you do your daily business, glorifying God by being a distinct blessing rather than a disrespectful nuisance to society. Okay? Submit to, respect, honour, love both the powers that be and the people around you.

So that any accusations that our society would be better off if you lot weren't around will have zero foundation to them. You know, so far as what we've been asked to do doesn't contravene God's word, I think we've got to take seriously what Peter is saying here about being a people who are

known for doing good in our community, in our world.

Now just what a counter-cultural attitude to have. So we've got to ask ourselves, as we respond to the call of our holy God tonight, are we doing?

[19 : 46] Are we being a blessing? I don't know about you, but I want to be the kind of church that this community would deeply miss if we ever moved from this area. If we shut up shop tonight, sold to Cala Homes, moved away to the other side of town, would there be deep mourning in this community because we're not here?

They say of us, do you remember them? Do you remember those guys they prayed for us? Do you remember how they invited us to things? Do you remember how they practically cared for the poor in our neighbourhood? Do you remember them?

Do you remember what they did? We were just so glad that they were here, we missed them. Think about it personally in our own lives as well. Do you remember those guys? Do you remember how, I'm thinking, sorry, we want to be the kind of neighbour that we would be sadly missing the same way if ever we were to move from our street.

Do you remember them? Do you remember how those guys used to take our recycling out? Do you remember how the door was always open? Do you remember how they always knew our name?

Do you remember how they always asked how we're doing?

Do you remember how they always took care of us when we were in need? We used to love having them on the parent-teacher council. We used to love having them as part of the community at Neighbourhood Watch.

[20 : 59] Do you get what I'm saying? Peter's saying be known for doing good. Are we known for doing good in this community, in our neighbourhoods? Kind of community?

Compelling, Christ-like, Christ-likeness. And thirdly and lastly, verses 18 to 25, he goes vocational. And he says, this is what holiness is going to look like in a job that demands you.

And what's it going to look like? It's going to look like in trusting. And in a context, the people that Peter has in mind here are slaves. Now that's going to look, that would have looked different in this day to what we might immediately picture when we hear that word.

This would have been household servants who are working for and living with a master. This is what is going on in a Greco-Roman society and economy.

And Peter says to them, because of your faith in Christ, because you serve him as your ultimate master, serve him by serving them.

[22 : 05] So be the best worker you can be. Be known for your integrity. Have a reputation for good deeds. And do your job for the glory of God.

And that sounds fine, but you see how he goes even further. He says, I want you to do that even if you don't quite get on with your master. And so this isn't a direct match quite between that and our work situations, but the principles I think are exactly the same.

Again, are you the kind of employee that if you were ever to move on from your place of work, that people would be deeply saddened that you've moved on?

Or would they actually be quite glad to see the back of you? Are we being a blessing to the people that we're working with? Again, do you remember how they used to buy us donuts?

Do you remember how they used to act differently from everyone else? Do you remember how they used to talk differently? Do you remember how they used to say that they were praying for us? I love Peter's pastoral heart on all of this, I must say, because that's not easy.

[23 : 13] Right? Being there, not easy at all. But where does Peter point them? All these verbs he's given them, urging them to live a holy life.

But where does he end up pointing them? To Jesus. The Jesus that not only cares, but who knows. The Jesus who knew insult, who knew ridicule, who knew suffering.

And what did Jesus do? What was his response? He entrusted himself to God. What is holiness going to look like for us as we respond to the call of our holy God to live holy lives that reflect him? It's going to look like abstaining, doing, and entrusting. And I want us to end tonight on Jesus.

Surprise.

Because what is holiness? You know, if all we come away from tonight is a big list of do's and don'ts. Going to try harder. Going to get up tomorrow at 5.30 and do my quiet time.

[24 : 19] If that's what we come away with, I think we'll find that we've missed it. And I think Kevin DeYoung, and he's written a great book called The Hole in Our Holiness. It's in my office if you want

to check it out afterwards.

I forgot to bring it in. But he says this, he says, pursuing holiness is not pursuing performance. It's pursuing a person. Really simply pursuing a person.

What is holiness other than living a life that is utterly captivated by Christ? And so the question I think comes to us as we end is, are we still thrilled with him?

Do we read the gospels and your heart just burns as you read about him? Do you love him? Do you know what he's done for you? Do you know who he is? And I love how Christians down the ages have called him the friend of sinners.

The friend of sinners. This is who he is tonight. Abiding in him, John 15, and allowing God by his spirit to change us from the inside out more into the image of Jesus.

[25 : 23] His holy God calls us to live holy lives. What does holiness mean? It means an all-out pursuit and a love for Jesus. Let me just close by telling you about my friend Mez.

And the story he tells in his book that he's just released called *The Least, The Last, The Lost*. It's a cracking read. I'm working my way through it just now. And he tells a story about going to his dad's birthday party.

And learning that this birthday party is going to be down the pub. And there's going to be lots of family friends there. And as part of the evening, someone's organized some adult entertainment.

And so he gets to that part of the evening and Mez and his wife decide we just cannot be here.

Cannot associate with what's going on here. And what they do is they get up and they head out and they go and sit in another room at another table.

And so as they get up and as they go, they are met with just scowling faces everywhere. But as the evening goes on, people one by one begin to drift in.

[26 : 24] And they say to them, why will you not join in? And so he tells them. And he tells them why. He tells them about Jesus.

And so this party where they thought they were likely to be the first to leave, actually turned out to be a party where they were one of the last one to leave. And it would be lovely to leave it there.

But he goes on and he says as he left that party, and I take it that God by his Holy Spirit impacted him so much that he reflected in the fact that as nice as it was to meet people and to tell them about Jesus, he was so aware that all of them just went back to the party.

And none of them claimed any interest really in Jesus. And so he was left with that gut-wrenching feeling that they will all one day have to give account of their lives to this holy God without their sins being atoned for.

And there, as we are before the judgment seat of God, as Jesus talks about in Matthew 25, where he divides the world into the sheep and the goats, into heaven and to hell.

[27 : 37] Mez is buying on the money when he says, when people come before this holy God, people will feel out of their depth.

And so I think as we've been reflecting over these last number of weeks on who our God is, I think we've got to ask ourselves as we finish tonight, do we share the missionary heart of our holy God for people who just do not know him, for people who will one day have to give an account for their lives before his blinding holiness.

As we were thinking about this morning, what do we do when we come face to face with the grace of Jesus, other than fall on our knees and share his compassion for a lost and broken world? You know, I love it.

And we close with this, the words of facing a task unfinished. And so as a Christian hymn that was written by Mission Raising, it's been sung down the generations. And I think it captures it so well.

Facing a task unfinished that drives us to our knees, a need that undiminished rebukes our slothful ease.

We who rejoice to know thee, renew before thy throne the solemn pledge we owe thee to go and make thee known. This is our holy God tonight who calls us to come and worship him, come and know him, and share his heart for the peoples of the world.

[29 : 02] So let's just have a moment of silence and then Pete's going to come up and we'll move on with the evening. Let me pray. So Heavenly Father, Lord, we would just want to repent of our small ideas of who you are.

And we would want to just plead with you, Lord, longing that you would lift our eyes to the greatness, your greatness, the one that Isaiah saw where he fell on his face, the one where the

seraphim declared, holy, holy, holy.

Father, remind us of who you are tonight. I thank you that you are the holy God who has come near in Christ. Thank you, Lord, for your love for a broken and a dying world.

So Father, I pray tonight that you would help us to live holy lives as we respond to your greatness.

Lord, would you challenge us, convict us, shape us, mold us. Lord, would we come to know something more of that heart of Jesus who had compassion on people and he looked on them helpless and commented that they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Our Father, we thank you for your great love for us tonight. And we pray all these things and commit ourselves to you now, Lord. Be with us as we chat, as we discuss, as we laugh, as we pray, as we cry.

[30 : 30] Father, be with us as we ask for the remainder of this evening. In Jesus' name. Amen.