

We come to the second in this series and Isaiah 6.

I wonder as you heard those opening verses read what strikes you there....

Let me suggest the only bit that doesn't strike us is the opening phrase "In the year that King Uzziah died". We may celebrate the birth of a new Princess, but by and large we are not interested in King Uzziah or King Alfred or any King. So as we look at this passage we say let's get on to the main stuff this steam train that's spreading lots of smoke around as it goes through the temple. But, as befits one who taught history let me stop for a moment because we need to understand these opening words if we are to truly understand the passage.

We are told that these events happened in the year King Uzziah died, about 740BC.

Now how were things going in Judah at that time? The answer in general is not good. Chap 5:8 sums it up "Woe". The reason is made clear, "they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the Lord's anger burns against his people" (Isa 5:24-25).

The specific reason why things are not great is down to this king Uzziah. He was basically a good king. However, he went astray. In 2 Chron 26.16 we read, "But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense".

So at the end of Chap 5 the scene is pretty dark. Then Uzziah died.

The question is now what for God's people? Last week in 1:18, we saw the King's desire as God called to his people, ""Come now let us reason together" says the Lord "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow"". God was offering to debate with them which of two ways they were going to go, either carry on as they were and head for disaster or return to God and know blessing.

However the question which this chapter considers is if there is to be a change and if the King's desire is to be fulfilled and the nation is to turn back to God what is needed?

We have to recognise that what was needed was not a great messenger, because as we see Isaiah was a sinner as much as everyone else. No what was needed was a new vision of God as the Holy one and that was what happened and is what is at the heart of this event we look briefly at today. So let me ask who have you seen? Which celebrities have you seen? I understand that people love celebrity spotting in London such as this one on the screen of Harry Styles outside a café in Primrose Hill. We do like to talk of the people we have seen, to drop names and so on. In a sense it is nice to meet celebrities. My problem is that I could walk past most and have no idea who they were!

For Isaiah it was a bit more than celebrity spotting that he was indulging in and there was no way he would not recognise who he was seeing!

### **1. I saw the Lord v1**

Such very plain words to describe an amazing experience. It's a bit like asking someone about winning the FA cup, having their first baby, becoming Prime Minister or such like and they say "yeah it's alright".

"I saw the Lord". I bet that wasn't in his diary for that day. What Isaiah calmly states here is that he has seen God. Note how Isaiah describes God. He describes him as seated on a throne. This is the one who is King. This is the one who rules over the whole of creation. This is the Lord of Lords, the King of kings, the only ruler over the nations.

Isaiah describes God as "high and lifted up". In these words we get a sense of the exalted nature of God of him being so much greater than his creation and so much greater than the false gods which have led God's people astray and continue to lead us astray. Here Isaiah saw God "high and lifted up". Exalted, majestic, unequalled. Later on in the prophecy this greatness of God and his difference from humanity and this natural world is spelt out in many different ways, "Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me." (Isa 46:9). "“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa 55:8-9)

What Isaiah saw, and relates to us, is the uniqueness of God, the majesty of God as the King and the otherness of God. This is our God who alone is God and who alone reigns over the whole of creation as King and Lord. Take a moment to reflect on that. If Isaiah was actually in the temple in Jerusalem, then he had come to be in the presence of God. That presence it was believed was located in the Holy of Holies behind the curtain. Then suddenly it was as if the curtain had been lifted and for a moment Isaiah was able to see God and he was on the throne, high and lifted up.

Imagine that this morning, as you came into the worship area here to be with God's people in God's presence, suddenly the curtain, as it were, is lifted and you can see the immortal, invisible God. Or imagine that you settle down tomorrow morning for your time of Bible reading and prayer and suddenly the curtain is lifted and you see God. What I am trying to get across from this vision of Isaiah is that this is the God we come to day by day Sunday by Sunday. This is God. He is God. He is the King. He is exalted.

This vision was given to the prophet at a time when the attitude of the people towards God was very lax. We saw this last week when God said to his people, "When you come to appear before me, who

has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts” (Isa 1:12). I likened that to a party of school children on a trip to an art museum just crashing through with scant regard for what they are seeing. Isaiah sees God as the Lord almighty enthroned on high. This is the God to whom we come. I hope that makes us stop and think about how we approach him. I hope we can see the need to come with a right attitude recognising to whom we are coming. We are even now in the presence of the Lord almighty.

## **2. Holy, holy, holy is the lord Almighty v3**

Not only is God the Lord almighty, seated on the throne he is the Holy Lord.

He saw the holiness of God. We see that in the cry of the seraphim in v3 “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” That is not a Trinitarian statement but the Hebrew way of expressing the superlative not holy, holier, holiest as we might say but three times holy. There is no one more holy than the Lord Almighty. And also the holiness is shown in v4 in the smoke and fire, which takes us back to Sinai and the giving of the law.

Isaiah saw God majestic, sovereign and Holy.

This is a great theme in Isaiah who often refers to God as ‘the Holy One of Israel’.

But what does it mean to say God is holy?

The word has within it the ideas of different and separate. God is different from humanity and through that difference separate. I think we can begin to understand this when we see that God called his people to be ‘holy’, “Be holy because I am holy” (Lev 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16).

What that meant can be understood in those two words, separate and different and that their difference had a moral dimension to it. They were a people defined by their relationship to God and that relationship was defined by the law and especially the 10 commandments. They were a holy people because their following the law of God made them different to the nations around them and it separated them out from them.

When Isaiah refers to God as ‘the Holy one of Israel’ he is referring to him being separate from humanity and different to humanity. He is speaking of God’s transcendence and his righteousness. Holy is morally pure.

It is this which both defines God and separates God. At a time of moral decay this was the vision the people of God needed and yet it is this understanding of God and awareness of God as holy which causes fear in humans.

I was watching the James Bond film, ‘Die another day’ some time back. At the start of the film Bond is captured and held in a North Korean prison. He is then swapped and held by the British. He escapes and swims to freedom. He then walks into a posh hotel looking very unkempt and wearing just soaking wet pyjamas. Now for some of us that is our nightmare, turning up to some event

inappropriately dressed. Here in the response of Isaiah in v5 we see the common human response to the awareness of God's holiness and that is to be aware of our own sinfulness. We are as it were not dressed ready to meet God.

God's people were living immoral lives and their king Uzziah had of late not helped that. Their faith and their morality was in decline. What did they need? What could restore their faith in God and their obedience to God's law? Could another king do this? Well it might help. However, as we read in 2 Chron 27:2, Uzziah's son Jotham tried his best but "the people however continued their corrupt practices".

No the clear point from what we are seeing here is that if we would see our faith renewed what we need is a new vision of God.

Isaiah saw God as holy and trembled before him as he should a sinner in the presence of the holy God and indeed as should all of us. Isaiah was given this vision not just to stir him as a man of God but to use to stir the people of God to return to God. The sadness is that this would not happen. However they are not the only ones whose faith and morality is in decline. This has been the problem for the people of God down the ages and continues to be because we are all human. This is our problem as individuals here this morning and as a church. We know how easily we get deflected from the path of faith how gradually we can 'lose our faith'. We also know that we find the tempter close at hand and sin lurks at our door.

If we would see our faith renewed so that we live lives which honour and please God it will not be because of the equivalent of a new king, so say because we join a new homegroup, or get a new Minister or read a new book. It will be as we have a new vision of God.

That is the aim of this year and that is the aim of looking at Isaiah.

For the people at the point when king Uzziah died, their faith and their morality was in decline. As you look at your life today how is your faith, your relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ? Is it vibrant, growing having an impact on your daily living and your relationships with people around you? Or have you grown a bit cold? Have you stopped reading the Bible, stopped praying, stopped coming to worship as often as you used to?

Then what about the way you live. If God were to write a report on your life over the last say six months would it be a positive report of really sought to live the way of Christ or are there serious moral blemishes that need sorting out?

For the people round Isaiah their faith and their morality was in decline and their great need was a new vision of God.

For many of us, and yes I include myself, we may admit the same and our need is the same.

Look back at the words with me and in your mind catch a glimpse of what Isaiah saw but more let the words and the vision sink into your heart and by the power of the Holy Spirit begin to do their own work of refreshing and renewing our faith and life as we follow Jesus.

“I saw the Lord high and exalted” (v1). This is our God who reigns over the whole of creation. Who alone is worthy of our praise, worship and service. The God who calls us to love and serve him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. This is the one true God whose power and love knows no end. Who else will you serve? Who else will you worship? Who else will you honour?

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty” (v3). This is our God who is perfect in holiness, in purity and righteousness. Who calls us to be holy as he is holy. But more who has enabled us to be holy. He has through the death of Jesus removed the barrier of sin which separates sinful humanity from the holy God so that, as we saw last week, “he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight,” (Col 1:22). But having made us holy he look for us to live in holiness and righteousness.

This is our God the king who is the holy one. If we would see our faith renewed what we need is a new vision of God, the king who is holy.