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Title: *What Kind of God #3 - "God is Holy"*

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8

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Good morning and welcome to Orchard Hill. If you have a Bible, take it and turn with me to Isaiah six. Maybe on your device, the words will appear on the screen in just a moment. And maybe as you're finding your way there, I just want to mention that in September, we're planning to start a new launch gathering launch group in Beaver.

We've talked about this for a little while and you've heard us talking about our campus pathway if you've been around. Our hope ultimately is to have ten different campuses beyond our Wexford campus around the region that are 500 people capable, meaning they could have the infrastructure and space to support 500 people. We have Butler and the Strip District, which are doing really well. The group in Southpointe is really committed. They've had some challenges recently, but the group that's there is passionate about seeing Orchard Hill established in that area of the city, and this will be a new group. And if you're interested in being a part of that, you can either reach out to the church or you can go to orchardhillchurch.com/pathway.

And if you're around Orchard Hill and you say, I'd love to see Orchard Hill in another part of the city where I live and move or the region, the way that you can be a part of that is also just going to orchardhillchurch.com/pathway. Let us know if there's an area that you think could be great. And what we've tried to do is simply as a whole community of faith say, where is God moving or creating opportunity? And so, thank you for just being a part of that.

So let me read from Isaiah chapter six verses one through eight. It says this, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" This is the word of the Lord.

Let's pray. God, as we gather today, I ask that you speak to each of us, that my words would reflect your word in content and in tone and in emphasis. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We started a couple of weeks ago a series talking about what kind of God the Bible speaks of. People have a lot of ideas in our culture about what God is like, but what does the Bible actually say? And there are dozens of qualities or attributes that we could say exist as part of who God is. And what we're doing is just trying to take some of the ones that may be overarching. And so, we talked about God as Trinity and then we talked about God as Omni last week. Our team did a great job teaching in all our locations. And by Omni, what we

meant is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. So, all-knowing, always present, everywhere present, and all-powerful.

And today we're going to talk about the holiness of God. And here's what I would guess is true. And that is most of us don't use the word holy, except in basically two instances. Some of us will use the word holy with another word that goes with it. That is kind of an oxymoron where we'll say, Holy cow, I don't know what you were thinking. But whether it's cow or something else, you have this word and you say this is in juxtaposition with this other word because this other word is common. It's not distinct. There's nothing special about it. And so, when we say holy cow or holy something, what we're doing is we're saying this is beyond kind of what I think it should be.

The other place that I've heard the word used is generally in the phrase about a Christian or Christian people, and it's usually derogatory. It's said to be that they're a bunch of holy rollers. And there are a lot of other places that I can think of, at least off the top of my head, where we use the word holy very often. And yet this is the word that is used to describe God in Isaiah six and in other places. And what's striking in Isaiah six is that when Isaiah sees the Lord, he's revealed to Isaiah as holy. And three times the cherubim recite this phrase holy, holy, holy. And in Hebrew, the language that underlies our Old Testament, there weren't exclamation points, or you wouldn't necessarily put things in all capitals in order to say this is a way to emphasize something. What they did is they would repeat the word. And so, to repeat a word three times was a way to say this is of the ultimate significance or this is completion perfection. And so, they say you're holy, holy, holy.

The word *godosh* means to be set apart, to be completely separate, and can even mean to be cut off. And so, the way that God is revealed here is as being other, being completely distinct. And in our culture, there's a tendency to think of God not as being other, not as being distinct, but to think of the immanence of God. And to be clear God is imminent. He is close, and he is nearby. But what I mean when I say we tend to think of it in our culture is we tend to overemphasize the immanence of God and reduce this holiness, this otherness of God. And what that means is we tend to think about the big guy or the guy upstairs or the God who I could always have access to, rather than the God who is holy and who is other.

A.W. Tozer wrote about this. He said, "The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for millions." See, one of the reasons we don't like to think about the holiness of God is because when we see God as other, then it means that God isn't just simply this kind of happy grandpa who says everyone can come and have a cookie, but instead there is a seriousness and otherness to who God is.

So, when we come to Isaiah six, which is the passage we've chosen to just concentrate our thinking about the holiness of God today, I think we see three different aspects of seeing or understanding the holiness of God. And that is we see the holiness of God or God's holiness involves looking up, it involves looking in, and it involves looking out. So, we're going to look at these first.

Seeing God's holiness involves looking upward, verses one through four. This is where we read this statement about the year King Uzziah died. And certainly, that's a historical marker

to say there was an actual King Uzziah that lived, and this is the time in which Isaiah lived. But there's also something else that I think is happening here.

When Uzziah died, it meant that there would be a transition in the nation, and some of the security, some of the things that Isaiah had come to count on would no longer be the way that they were. And it's often when our world is turned upside down or there's hardship, difficulty, or loss, that we're open to seeing God in a way that sometimes we don't see God at other times.

And then it says very simply that he was high and exalted, seated on a throne. And so, his vision of God is of the greatness and the splendor of this God. And there's a train that fills the temple. And then we're told about these beings, these Seraphim. And this is a word, there's some debate, if you read commentaries on this kind of thing but the Seraphim were clearly some kind of a big thing that could communicate the glory and splendor of God. And we're told that with two wings, that they had six wings, that they covered their face or their eyes to say we can't totally look at the holiness of God. With two wings they covered their feet. Sometimes in the Hebrew language, feet were a euphemism for genitals. And so there may have been a sense of saying, we're covering our shame or covering ourselves from something. Or at least feet were considered to be ignoble. And then with two they flew.

And then we see in verse four it says that there was shaking, and the temple was filled with smoke. If you ever stood at the edge of a storm and then overwhelmed at how small and powerless you were compared to the storm, that's a little bit of what's happening here for Isaiah as he says, God is powerful, he's other.

N.T. Wright wrote a book several years ago called *Simply Christian*, and he wrote it as a way to communicate what faith can look like to those maybe who haven't had faith. And in it, he talks about four longings of the human heart. And what he basically says is this. And that is we all have a longing for justice. We have a longing for spirituality. We have a longing for community, and we have a longing for beauty. And he does a beautiful job unpacking those things and saying those longings are actually the very things that point to our desire for God because in a sense, these are the holiness or the otherness of God. So, every time that you see injustice in this world, and you're bothered by it, it's a sense in which you're longing for the otherness, the holiness of God. When you see beauty and you say that's just a glimpse of something amazing, it's a longing for God when you long for deep community or you sense that there's something more. Those are our longings for who God is.

And it's interesting to me, at least in this section, that it says in the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. Isaiah did not decide how to seek God and make it happen. He saw the Lord because he was, in a sense, the wording here is passive in a sense, just responding to what he saw. And all I mean by this is you can't always force it to happen on cue when you want it to, but when you have a moment of the veil being pulled back, so to speak, and you see the glory of God, if you will look into it, then it will help you to have a vision of God's otherness and what God is really like.

I want to draw just a little picture of something. No stoic people today. This is something that I have drawn and shared before. It comes from a book by a man named Jack Klumpenhouwer. And it is a book called *Show Them Jesus*. And we use this when we have new staff to help

them hopefully understand what we would say is the difference between a moralistic approach to faith and more of a gospel-centered approach to faith. And what Jack Klumpenhouwer does in his book is he at one point draws this chart, has this chart drawn. On one side is the holiness of God and on the other side is our sin. And what he says is that as we come to experience this, and I've shared this before, but I think this is so fundamental it's worth repeating, what he says is when we come to understand the holiness of God in our sin, that it is then that we recognize our need for Jesus Christ, our need for a Savior.

So sometimes what happens is, some people will say, well, maybe God is great and he's other, but I'm a person who's perfectly just. I always bring beauty to the world. I'm somebody who doesn't have any shortcomings in those areas. But when we actually see the holiness of God, the otherness of God, and our sinfulness, what happens is we recognize that only the cross of Jesus Christ can bridge that gap. We can't make ourselves holy enough. We can't be enough, good enough, or do enough to say now I have achieved something that makes me acceptable to God but it's on the basis of Jesus Christ that we get there. And the way that we see this is when we come to see who God really is. So that's the first aspect of seeing the holiness of God is it's looking upward.

Here's the second aspect, and I'm just going to say this is looking inward. We see this in verses five through seven. Notice what it says. Isaiah cried, woe to me. Now, I don't know what the tone of this would have been. We don't really know exactly. But woe in the Hebrew language was a way of saying this is frightening, this is concerning. This wasn't like, woe is me. This was like, whoa, I've seen God and now I'm seeing myself. And He says I'm ruined. I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips. So why does he mention lips here? We tend to think of our actions as being sinful, not necessarily our lips. But notice what he does. He says I'm a man of unclean lips, and it's significant to me that he starts with himself before he looks at other people. Because what a lot of us will do when we see injustice in the world or we see problems is we'll be very quick to say look at the sins or the problems or the ways that somebody else, some other group doesn't respond to God rather than saying this is about me. But when we really see who God is, we cannot help but see our own sin. And this was what happened to Isaiah.

You see, a lot of times what we'll want to do is say this is a really important message for somebody else or this is something I wish they would hear. And what we need to do is be able to say, my sinfulness when it's exposed to God, reveals my needs. So, why lips? I think part of the reason for this is that when our mouths speak, they reveal what's from the heart. Jesus said that and Mark. And a lot of times our mouths speak out our pride. Here's what we read in Second Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 20. It says, "For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder."

What are those? Those are sins of the tongue, fits of rage. Where it comes out of our mouths reveals something in our hearts where we say, I'm unhappy that you don't fulfill what I think you should fulfill. Discord and disunity are ways that we sit and are critical of other people. And what that is, is a sin of the tongue. And when we see God, what happens is we begin to see our own sinfulness. And then he says, and I live among a people of unclean lips. So, it

isn't just that I recognize my own sinfulness, but I see that in Isaiah's case, the people of Israel and all of us have a need to come to see things as God sees them.

Now, I don't know how you respond when a light is shined on your shortcomings. Sometimes one of the places where this happens is in marriage, and you know how this is if you've been married. The other day a while back, my wife and I were having a conversation about something with our kids, and she didn't think that I was handling something the way that I should handle it. And so, she exposed it to me. And I had that initial first moment where I'm thinking, oh, come on, you're wrong. I'm right. Leave me alone. And what happens a lot of times is we want to manage the process of owning what we're called out on, and we want to manage consequences. And that certainly happens with God.

Or we say, if I've seen something, I'm going to try to make either God's standard less or my sin less. And the point of this illustration is really what he says, is if our cross stays the same size as we grow, there's a gap between God's holiness in the cross and between our sin and the cross. Now, to be fair, no one picture can capture everything. Certainly, if you grow in understanding God, your holiness will grow with it. What He's talking about is our perception will ultimately have a bigger gap because we'll say, I recognize where I didn't used to see sin, my sin, and I recognize holiness.

Sometimes people will say a church that's always talking about grace is helping people live in a way that gives them license to do whatever they want. But the opposite is actually true because if you're talking about grace, what happens is you don't have to lower the standard to say, oh, I'm good enough and you don't have to obscure your sin or hide your sin. What you can do instead is you can say, God's standard is the standard and my sin is big, and I don't need to try to minimize my sin or lower the standard because what again, Jack Klumpenhower ultimately says is the cross gets bigger as we come to understand this.

And so, what the holiness of God does when you're exposed to it, when I'm exposed to it, is it actually says I'm not as good as I think I am because of God's standard. And the more that we grow spiritually, the more we understand that it isn't just about some actions and some ideas, but it's about our thoughts, and that we can even do things that are good for the wrong reasons in ways that somehow make us somebody who needs to repent. And our sin is big.

And then what we see in this passage is that the seraphim fly with live coal in the hand. And there's some debate about how the coal acts as an atoning thing, and most think that it has something to do with the purifying fire. "With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Sometimes people think that Christianity is something that is negative inherently because it talks about sin, but I believe it's actually freeing because what that means is you can say I don't have to pretend to be better or lower the standard somehow, but what I can do instead is come and say I know that God continues to work in my life in different ways. You see, ultimately, without understanding atonement and forgiveness and God's grace getting bigger and bigger, the cross getting bigger and bigger, what will happen is you and I will deny our sinfulness, we'll argue with the standard, or we'll end up feeling helpless. But the message again of the holiness of God is that Jesus has been holy on behalf of you and me.

And as we get more and more aware of God's holiness and our sinfulness, the cross and the beauty just gets bigger.

Maybe it's a little bit like this. What if God's standard was that we had to swim across the Atlantic Ocean to meet God's standard? Well, here's what's true about that. Some of us would be able to swim farther than some of the rest of us. And then there are people who would be able to swim way farther than probably any of us in this room. Olympic athletes, people who are swimmers, they'd be able to swim way farther, but nobody would come all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. It is impossible. And the standard may bother some of us because we say, well, why would God give us an impossible standard?

But the freedom of it is saying that I don't have to say, well, as long as I swim farther than somebody else or anything else, we can just simply say, I can't do it. Jesus has done it on my behalf, and that's where freedom comes from. So, holiness involves looking up to see the Lord. It involves looking in to see our sin.

And then I'm just going to simply say it involves looking outward to see the need. Notice how this passage moves. It says in verse eight. "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" We talked about the Trinity a couple of weeks ago in the use of the plural in the Old Testament. Here it is again, who will go for us? And Isaiah says, here I am, send me. Certainly, this teaches us that God uses sinful and broken people because sinful and broken people are all that there are.

And God's heart is that people everywhere would come to know Him and to praise what he has invited us into. And the reason that this is helpful is sometimes, again, people's perception of Christianity is that Christianity is simply a way of saying, listen, come be like us, we're right. Everybody else is wrong. But nothing could be further from the truth because Christianity isn't about having the right beliefs. It does have beliefs that matter and can be in our right. But it isn't about saying I'm right. Everybody else is wrong. It's about saying I'm sinful and Jesus has done for me what I can't do. And He invites anyone, everyone to come. You see, it's broad because we aren't saying I'm holy, I've met the standard. It's broad because we say I haven't met the standard, but Jesus does it on my behalf and God's heart here is to say who will go and help more and more people understand this.

My wife and I went to a restaurant recently with some friends and we had a great dinner at a restaurant I had never been to. It's been around for a few years. I won't tell you the name, but here's why I tell you this. We went to the restaurant. It was a great dining experience, and what was natural for me was to want to tell people about the restaurant I went to, and say, oh, it was great. The service was great, the food was great, and the atmosphere was great. It was awesome. You know, this was the restaurant. And here's my point. Sometimes those of us who have come to say, I believe that God is holy, that he's full of beauty and goodness and justice, and he's made a way for me who isn't full of all of those things to share in it now and in the future, and we get more excited to tell people about a restaurant we've gone to than about the God of the universe.

And so, there's a sense in which coming to know this God causes us to look outward. And even as you read down a little farther in this chapter, verse nine, and following, what we see is that it wasn't easy for Isaiah. "He said, 'Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never

understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.” God says a lot of people aren't going to get it. They're not just going to say, oh, this is great. He says, “Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes.” And yet Isaiah just simply said, I'll go.

Sometimes here at Orchard Hill, we talk about it as the ministry of invitation, you know, the simple thought of just saying, come and see what God has done in my life, and inviting other people to share in that is saying that is my response to the holiness of God. Your Holiness is not the easiest concept. Not because it's super hard to understand, but because it's other. To say God is distinct, he's holy, he's high, he's exalted. But when we see it, then what happens is we're moved to worship this God to see again our need and revel in the grace of Jesus Christ, and to look beyond ourselves and say, how can I invite people who don't necessarily see this, get it, believe it, to share in this with me?

What I'd like to do today, just to end our time, is I'd like to just lead you in a prayer that comes from the *Book of Common Prayer*, the “Prayer of Confession.” And so, if you just with me now, either bow your head or close your eyes, the words will be on the screen if you want to follow along that way, but I just ask you to let these words today shape your thinking and thought. “Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against thee in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved thee with our whole heart; We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; That we may delight in Thy will, and walk in thy ways, To the glory of thy Name. Amen.”

God, help us to see Your Holiness, to savor Your Grace, and to respond with worship and adoration and outward movement. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.