

Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty  
Isaiah 6:1-13  
Key Verse: 6:3

"And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'"

Happy New Year 2010! Recognizing a new year is not merely a human convention. Genesis teaches us that God made the sun, moon and stars to mark seasons and days and years. Marking the passing of time is inherent in God's creation. God has given us time, and he wants us to use it well. How will you use your time in the coming year? Some people look at their clocks or watches frequently, in eager anticipation of quitting time. Their desire is to leave work or school as soon as possible and enjoy fun. So one teacher put a sign under her classroom clock. It read: "Time will pass, will you?" We must use our time well. Psalm 90:12 says, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." This is why we choose key verses at the beginning of each year. We want God to guide us with his wisdom so that our year may be fruitful and prosperous.

In the book of Isaiah, we find a man whom God used greatly, not only in his generation but in God's redemptive history. Many consider him to be the greatest Old Testament prophet. He served the southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (1:1). His ministry began with a vision of the Lord in the temple. This vision shaped his perspective and helped him set a direction which led to fruitful ministry. As we begin 2010, let's catch a glimpse of this vision of God. It may be most essential in guiding us to a fruitful new year.

I. The Lord seated on a throne (1-4)

Verse 1 begins, "In the year that King Uzziah died...." As we studied in 2 Kings, Uzziah, also known as Azariah, was one of the relatively good kings in Judah's history. He reigned for 52 years, from about 792 to 740 B.C., doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord (2 Ki 15:3). So the Lord gave Uzziah success. Uzziah defeated many enemy nations, and Judah enjoyed peace and prosperity. However, when Uzziah became powerful, he became proud. He presumed to act as a priest, and he was struck with leprosy. Uzziah lived as a leper for the rest of his reign, a period of perhaps ten years.

During the time of peace and prosperity, Judah's spiritual condition began to degenerate. They worshiped idols of many kinds (Isa 2:6-8). The elders and leaders were not shepherds; instead they used their suffering people for material gain. The women of Judah became haughty. They did not fear God or pray for their men. Instead, they enticed men with their charms, stole their hearts from God, and used them to satisfy their vanity (Isa 3:14-16). Young men, who should have had vision and hope for the future, were full of despair. They spent their time in drinking parties (Isa 5:11-12). To Isaiah's eyes, Judah was becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa 1:9,10), which God destroyed by fire for their godless immorality. So Isaiah was compelled to share the message of God's judgment (Isa 5:8-30).

Judah's degeneration reminds me of America over the last 50 years. It has been a time of prosperity unparalleled in the history of the world. Yet, during this time, we have seen prayer removed from public schools, rampant sexual immorality, the legalization of abortion, a skyrocketing divorce rate, and random acts of violence on campuses. Furthermore, there is empirical evidence that the American Christian church is declining in number for the first time since the Second Great Awakening. This holds true across denominational lines. Dr. Billy Graham once said that if God does not judge America, he must apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. This is true. Yet, taken by itself, it can make us hopeless about the future and negative.

At that very time, the Lord showed Isaiah a vision that changed his perspective completely. It was a vision of the Lord. Look at verse 1b. "...I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple." The Lord revealed himself in glory and majesty. When we imagine the whole scene, it reveals the Lord as Sovereign Ruler of creation. His throne is in the heavens, the train of his robe fills the temple, and the whole earth is full of his glory. The Lord was reigning over all creation without feeling threatened by anything. The Lord was not stressing out about the powers of darkness. The Lord was securely seated on his throne, a throne that was so high and exalted that it was beyond the reach of any other power or ruler. The Lord Almighty reigned supreme over all.

The Lord was accompanied by seraphs. They were angelic beings, holy and spiritual (Rev 4). Isaiah tells us that they had six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, for they were not worthy to look at the Lord face to face. With two wings they covered their feet, because they were unworthy to serve the Lord. And with two wings they were flying. Though they were unworthy, they did their best to serve the Lord with speed and power.

Look at verse 3. "And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'" It is indeed significant that they repeated the word "holy" three times. In the Bible, if something is repeated twice, it is really, really important. If it is repeated three times, we must give our utmost attention to it. The three-fold repetition of "holy" emphasizes that the essential quality of the Lord is holiness. The Lord has many attributes. The Bible says that God is one (Dt 6:4), God is mighty (Job 36:5), God is a righteous judge (Ps 7:11), God is merciful and forgiving (Dan 9:9), God is spirit (Jn 4:24), God is faithful (1 Cor 10:13), God is just (2 Thes 1:6), God is light (1 Jn 1:5), God is love (1 Jn 4:8). Yet the essential characteristic revealed here is his holiness. Therefore, we must realize that God is holy, whatever else we may know about him.

What, though, does it mean that the Lord is holy? This is not at all easy for us to understand. Nevertheless, we must do our best to understand it. In Old English, the word "holy" is closely related to the word "whole." This means that everything that should be there is there, and that what is there is the totality of a thing. In other words nothing is missing; it is perfect. So to say that God is holy, in this sense, is to say that God is whole, or perfect, in all of his attributes, and that this absolute perfection is the most defining characteristic of God. It means that God's love is perfect love, his justice is perfect justice, his goodness is perfect goodness, and so on.

Consequently, it follows, that another meaning of "holy" is "set apart." This does not mean separated by space. It means separated by the quality of his being. The Lord is so superior to anything in his creation that he is beyond compare, "a cut above," "set apart." Therefore, when a created being encounters the holy God it becomes aware of the infinite gap between itself and God. Because God is holy, he cannot be fully understood in light of human experience, reason, or knowledge. To encounter the holy God is to experience something out of this world which totally transforms us.

In verse 3, another attribute of God is mentioned: he is the Lord Almighty. He has the power to do anything. He is the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth by the word of his mouth. He is also the Redeemer God who delivered the helpless Israelites from slavery by exerting his mighty strength. He did not spoil them with his power, but trained them in the wilderness to become useful people. This Lord Almighty was seated on the throne. Later, Isaiah calls him the King (5). The Lord makes a contrast with Uzziah. Although Uzziah was a relatively good king, he was also a sinful man. Due to his corruption, he abused his power, and people suffered under his reign. However, the real King of Judah and all creation is the holy Lord Almighty. He never abuses his power. He never gets sick or grows tired or weary; he never gets old. His reign is always perfect and it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. Ultimately, his reign brings about the kingdom where there are no tears, sorrows, pains or death. His reign brings about the everlasting kingdom marked by peace, joy and love.

Look at verse 3b. "...the whole earth is full of his glory." Even in a fallen world, the essential reality is that God is living and working in all of his creation for his good purpose. The whole earth is full of his glory. With human eyes, we see injustices, tragedies and sorrows of all kinds. But when we see through the lens of the Lord's sovereign rule, we find the Lord's glory. In September of 2008, Vidalito and Ivy Rose Lomahan experienced the death of their three month old son Aaron. It was sorrowful. Yet, they looked through their tears to see a loving and good God who was with them. They entrusted Aaron's life to the Lord and drew closer to the Lord in devotion. The Lord gave them joy in the midst of sorrow, and peace in the midst of their pain. Then, in June of 2009, the Lord granted them another son, Xachary, on the very same date that Aaron had been born. Xachary is healthy, handsome, and strong. They want to have him baptized next Sunday. It is their expression of faith in God. They have seen through the darkness to the marvelous light of God's glory. God is good and God is almighty and the whole earth is full of his glory.

As God's servants, we also must see our Sovereign Lord ruling his creation. This gives us hope and strength and power in any situation. Colossians 3:1-2 say, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." How can we do this? We should meditate on the word of God day and night. We should develop a consistent prayer life that brings us into the presence of the Lord on a regular basis. Then God's glory can shine in and through us and illuminate the darkness of the world around us. Let's hold the vision of the holy Lord Almighty in our hearts and minds in the new year of 2010.

## II. The Lord cleanses and commissions Isaiah (5-13)

This part tells us how Isaiah responded to his vision of the Lord and how the Lord further equipped Isaiah as his servant.

First, the Lord cleanses Isaiah's lips (5-7). Isaiah was overwhelmed by the holy presence of the Lord. He said, "Woe to me! I am ruined." Most translations read, "I am undone." He felt that he was falling apart. He found that what he had thought and said about God, himself and the world was all unclean. Before the holy living God, he was dust and ashes. He was not a pretty good guy; he was a terrible sinner. He was a "man of unclean lips." When he had spoken words of doubt, unbelief and despair, he had dirtied himself and polluted the world around him. Some think that American freedom of speech gives us the right to say whatever we want to say, at any time, to anybody. This is reckless. God will call us to account for every word that comes out of our mouths. Critical words that hurt others and words that express sinful desires are abhorrent to the Lord. This became unbearably clear to Isaiah as he listened to the seraphs sing the praise and glory of God. Isaiah expected God's judgment to fall upon him at any moment.

However, the Lord had mercy on helpless and miserable Isaiah. One of the seraphs flew to him with a live coal in his hand. This live coal represented the cleansing power of God that comes from the altar, where sacrifice is offered for the forgiveness of sins. The seraph touched Isaiah's lips with the live coal and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." We learn here that Isaiah had suffered from guilt. This guilt had been piling up throughout his lifetime until it was like a high mountain. It made his soul heavy, and he felt burdened, grumpy and critical. But at the touch of the live coal, his guilt dissolved in an instant. Peace and joy flooded his soul. Isaiah became light and free, like a bird flying in the sky. His relationship with God was restored and he found life and strength in God. He could stand before the holy God as his servant. What good news this is! When we come to God as we are, confessing our sins and shortcomings, the Lord does not condemn us. The Lord is willing to forgive and cleanse us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. The Lord enables us to stand before him and serve him in holiness and righteousness all our days (Lk 1:74,75). Some of us may have a burden of guilt in our hearts because of sins we committed in 2009. Let's come to Jesus right now by faith. He will forgive us and heal us by his grace.

Second, the Lord commissioned Isaiah (8-13). When Isaiah's sins were cleansed and his soul was healed, he began to hear the Lord speaking. The Lord was saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us." The Lord wanted to send someone to his people to share his message with them. The Lord had a broken heart for his people. He wanted to forgive, restore, and bless them (Isa 1:18-19). He was not only the holy and almighty God, but he was also a God of love and compassion and redemption. We must remember that though God is holy, his heart is broken for the lost world.

Isaiah had just experienced the marvelous grace of God. His heart was moved by God's love for him and his people. Love for God began to sprout in his heart. Love compelled him to offer his life to God for the salvation of his people. So he volunteered, "Here am I. Send me!" The Lord accepted his offer. The Lord commissioned Isaiah as a messenger to his people. What was the message? Look at verses 9-10. "Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving." Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." It seems that the result of Isaiah's message would be to make his people's hearts harder and harder. Almost without exception, God's servants want to see people accept the word of God, become God's children, and live holy and blessed lives. Seeing this gives one great joy and a sense of purpose. But Isaiah's ministry would make people's hearts harder. He would not see positive change as a result of his message but the hardening of people's hearts. At first glance, it seems that not carrying out this mission would be better for everybody.

So Isaiah asked, "For how long, O Lord?" The Lord told him to continue as long as there were people in the land, that is, until the nation had been judged completely for their sins. It means until there was no one left to hear the message. The Lord also told Isaiah that a holy seed would remain in the land. This refers to the line of godly people through whom the Messiah would come. In the end, the Lord would send Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who would defeat the power of sin and death completely through his suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus restores God's righteous reign and the kingdom of God. While on earth, Jesus told his disciples the parable of the sower. As he did so, he quoted from this passage in Isaiah. Jesus wanted his disciples to understand the characteristic of gospel work.

Though the gospel is the message of salvation, the good news of great joy for all people, many who hear do not accept it. In fact, their hearts become harder as they reject the message of Christ. But the Lord never gives up. He sends his servants to preach the gospel as long as there are people who will hear the message. The success of a gospel worker cannot be measured in terms of visible fruit of ministry. The success of a gospel worker is measured in terms of his faithfulness to the message he or she was sent to preach. We must keep on preaching the gospel message without compromise even when no one seems to respond well. In the course of time, God will do his own work for his own glory and purpose. God will reach his remnant people and make them part of his everlasting kingdom.

Sometimes we may feel that preaching the gospel to people who are not responding well is a waste of time. But in the long run God blesses his word to bear abundant fruit, fruit that endures into eternity. The most fruitful way to use our time is to share the gospel message with others. We may experience many rejections. But when even one person believes even one word of God through our message there will be a harvest of spiritual fruit that lasts to eternity. Let's make a decision to share the gospel with others in this new year. We cannot do this by our own strength. But we can do this when we have the vision of the Lord, in holiness and majesty, reigning in our hearts. May this vision fill our hearts in the year 2010.